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film
IN THE BATTLE OF
ideas



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GIFT OF

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Part I

THE BATTLE OF IDEAS

1. film and foreign policy

EARLY IN 1950, the *Saturday Review of Literature* (now known as the *Saturday Review*) published a discussion of the role of motion pictures in supporting the foreign policy of the United States. The series of editorials and articles, running through four issues of the magazine, revealed the difficulties facing propagandists for the government's war program, and the special tasks assigned to Hollywood in the global plan.

"The American movie," wrote Norman Cousins, "is the main source of information about America to most of the people of the world." Cousins regretted that American films portray our country predominantly as a "nation of murderers, gangsters, idlers, deadbeats, dipsomaniacs, touts, tarts and swindlers."

Cousins wanted motion pictures to inspire "respect for the workings of justice and representative government." Eric Johnston, head of the Motion Picture Producers Association, answered Cousins, arguing that Hollywood is doing a good job making films of "entertainment devoid of ideological lecturing or sermonizing." He described the Hollywood product as "Light and frothy musicals. Comedies. Yes, and some 'bang-bang' pictures, too, in which rustlers bite the dust when the brave cowboys take after them. Fun stuff. Escape stuff."

Johnston concluded in his inimitable Chamber of Commerce prose: "It is our everlasting hope that our motion pictures blend together to transplant before the eyes of others the shimmering, spectral pattern that is America." The reference to a "spectral pattern" tempts us to assume that Johnston sees the film reflection of life in the United States as a parade of ghosts. At all events, he is satisfied that motion pictures cross the seas as "messengers of a free country."

In a final article, Cousins emphasized the urgency of the export

problem. He attacked Johnston's "remarkable claim that no distinction need be made between the impact of a film on an American and on a foreign audience." He repeated his earlier insistence on the importance of films: "No medium can claim the attention of as many millions of people for such uninterrupted periods of time each week or each month. As concerns the war of ideas today, no medium is as effective in projecting America for foreign audiences."^{*}

Johnston and Cousins have told us a great deal, perhaps more than they intended, about the battle of ideas. They agree that the film must be judged as an instrument of foreign policy, and that pictures sent to other countries must meet the publicity requirements of the government. Indeed, they both make such a sweeping obeisance to governmental authority that they seem in danger of bumping their heads together. The propaganda problem is so pressing that they dispense with the usual amenities of "cultural" controversy. Their articles are notably lacking in respect for aesthetic standards or human values. They dispute about methods of indoctrination. Art and life, truth and beauty, have no place in the argument.

Cousins, as we have noted, is concerned solely with the effect on people of other countries of films which he describes as "cheapies about Americans who are fast talkers, fast drinkers, fast killers and fast lovers." He has no objection to the exhibition of these pictures in the United States; he seems to assume that the audience in this country accepts the portrait of themselves as a speaking likeness. Johnston also seems to have no objection to this type of film. He speaks of them affectionately as "Fun stuff. Escape stuff."

Yet there is a real difference between the two viewpoints. Cousins, as an "expert" in culture and communication, urges the need to cloak the war program in the garments of "democracy" and "freedom." Johnston, on the other hand, has little respect for these slogans and almost no comprehension of their meaning. He voices the contempt of Big Business for people and their aspirations. He quotes General MacArthur's tribute to Hollywood films for having "made a magnificent contribution . . . to the important

task of reorienting the Japanese people." He wants to impress foreigners with the wealth, the abundance of "dazzling gadgets," enjoyed by citizens of the United States.

In a sense, Cousins and Johnston represent a division of labor. One speaks of "ideals," while the other prefers the vulgarities of commercial "entertainment," with its emphasis on sex, violence and such-like "fun stuff." These two approaches have always characterized Hollywood films. What is significant about the debate between Cousins and Johnston is the fact that it appeared on the eve of the Korean war: as the rulers of the United States moved forward with their program of world domination by force of arms, it was urgently necessary to develop *both aspects* of the propaganda line, and to find some formula for reconciling the two aspects. Aggressive war must be presented as a "crusade for freedom"; at the same time, the real purposes of the "crusade"—larger profits, increased exploitation, mass destruction—must be justified and defended.

The problem of reconciling these contradictory aims is the nub of the argument between Johnston and Cousins. The propaganda dilemma was evident in all fields of communication in the months leading to the armed intervention in Korea. The Korean conflict deepened the dilemma. In July, 1950, the Washington *Evening Star* suggested that the government build a "propaganda machine that would employ only those who possess (1) the technique of the writer of modern advertising copy; (2) the wisdom of the philosopher; (3) the skill of a Machiavellian political scientist and (4) the intuition of the mystic."

Since these qualities are rarely found among the apologists for United States imperialism, a satisfactory formula for masking and resolving the contradictions has not been forthcoming.

The ideological difficulties which plague the defenders of Wall Street's program reflect the real difficulties in the implementation of that program. The victory over fascism in the Second World War created a new relationship of forces on a world scale. The Soviet Union emerged from the war steeled and strengthened in the anti-fascist struggle, dedicating its vast resources to peaceful reconstruction and the cultural enrichment of its people. In China and the Eastern Democracies of Europe, people's governments

* The series of editorials, Johnston's reply and Cousins' rejoinder, appeared in the issues of Jan. 2, Jan. 28, Feb. 4 and March 4, 1950.

undertook the task of building free societies, free from private exploitation, devoted to rational progress and human rights. These areas comprise eight hundred million people, one third of the earth's population. Other millions, still living in poverty and hunger, are beginning to plan and fight for liberation. All Asia is stirred by the achievements of the Chinese people. The struggle for freedom matures in Africa. There are deep currents of discontent in Europe and throughout the Western Hemisphere.

The Wall Street monopolists, unwilling to accept the limitations on their power growing out of the breakdown of imperialism and the increasing strength of the camp of socialism and peace, have appointed themselves the "saviors of Western Civilization" which means, in less guarded language, total war against the majority of the world's population. In order to undertake this insane task, all opposition within the United States must be crushed; the rear must be safeguarded by the establishment of fascism at home.

The "cultural" servants of Wall Street—"philosophers" and publicists and clowns—are supposed to make the program appear sweet and palatable, to distract attention from its manifold contradictions, to cover its bloody aims with a mantle of "moral necessity" and "historical inevitability." Since the propaganda is basically directed to the double goal of war and fascism, it runs counter to the deeper popular desire for peace and to the democratic aspirations of the masses of the people.

The propagandists have to lie about their objectives. As the lies are exposed, new and more sweeping lies have to be invented to cover up the revelation. The great achievements and peaceful aspirations of the people of other lands are slandered and misrepresented. The people of the United States are also slandered; they are told that it is "seditious" to defend their hard-won rights or to ask for better wages or improved living conditions or any guarantee of a peaceful future. To justify the destruction of rights won by the struggles of the working masses in the past, the significance of these rights and the struggles by which they were secured must be concealed or distorted. The humane and rational aspects of the bourgeois democratic heritage are mocked and denied, to be replaced by the cult of war, racism and the "superiority" of an elite class.

The fight for peace and democracy requires a vigorous struggle on the cultural front. Consistent analysis can unmask the methods by which the propagandists of imperialism seek to deceive their victims, and can lay bare the brutal and suicidal program underlying the pretentious musings of Wall Street's "scholars" and the antic buffoonery of Wall Street's "entertainers."

Hollywood is a key sector in the battle of ideas. The study of recent films provides a means of understanding the pattern of propaganda which is offered in various disguises in every field of scholarship and science, education and the arts.

2. *Hollywood and the Un-Americans*

A CARDINAL principle in the Marxist approach to culture is the recognition of the class character of all culture in class societies. The dominant class controls education, philosophy, religion, science and artistic expression, using these various disciplines and systems of belief and forms of art and communication to advance its interests and consolidate its power.

Since the bourgeoisie controls the state, it might be assumed that there can be no elements of conflict between governmental authority and the commercial production of culture—especially when production is under direct control of Wall Street corporations, as in the case of the film.

Yet the past few years have witnessed growing interference on the part of the state in the operation of the motion picture industry, with some protests on the part of industry leaders, and peremptory orders from representatives of the state for changes in employment and production policies.

The long investigation of Hollywood by the Congressional Un-Americans has sought to impose political censorship on motion pictures. The purpose has been stated repeatedly in the course of the proceedings. In his opening remarks at the 1947 hearings, Chairman J. Parnell Thomas (soon afterward sent to prison as a

common thief) spoke of "the tremendous effect which moving pictures have on their mass audiences," and observed that "what the citizen sees and hears in his neighborhood movie house carries a powerful impact on his thoughts and behavior."

Informers and stool pigeons, obeying the promptings of the Committee, asserted that "Communist ideas" were smuggled into pictures. Jack L. Warner testified regarding the work of suspected writers that "some of these lines have innuendoes and double meanings, and things like that, and you have to take 8 or 10 Harvard law courses to find out what they mean."

One can sympathize with the helplessness of the Vice-President of Warner Brothers in understanding the lines spoken in his films. The Committee helped him by defining "Communist ideology" (at least eight different times during the 1947 hearings) as the portrayal of a rich man as a villain. It also asserted that it is "Communism" to criticize members of Congress, or to show a discharged soldier dissatisfied with his prospects.

The Committee continued to give attention to the subject-matter of pictures in the hearings conducted in 1951. When a film director expressed doubt about Communist influence on content, the Committee's counsel, Frank L. Tavenner, Jr., insisted that "red influence" went back prior to 1925, when (according to Tavenner) "the Communist International directed the Communist Party of the United States to infiltrate that medium." These absurdities were endorsed by stoolpigeon witnesses such as Dmytryk and Kazan, who eagerly testified about left-wing interference with their "artistic integrity."

The Congressional inquisition, like the Smith Act trials, seeks to "prove" a portentous "conspiracy" in the realm of ideas, making it a "crime" to speak in defense of peace, progress and democracy. In this way, as the Council of the Authors' League of America pointed out in 1947, the Committee engages in an "immoderate, uncontrolled, radically harmful form of censorship," which is "fiercely unfair, basically undemocratic and deeply un-American," involving destruction of "the whole corpus of a man's work, past and future."*

* Statement of Authors' League Council, Dec. 4, 1947.

The nature of the Committee's aims explains the necessity of hearings lasting over many years. The film companies could not have instituted such a sweeping attack on democratic procedures and concepts without the assistance provided by the Committee and the barrage of propaganda emanating from the hearings. Wall Street corporations have often subverted the Bill of Rights, but such a destructive assault on the First Ten Amendments cannot be conducted successfully without recourse to the authority of the state. The use of governmental power to smash constitutional guarantees of democratic rights is the method of the fascist drive, preparing the way for the most reactionary elements of finance capital to open, unconcealed control of the state, and to make brutally repressive use of its police power.

We cannot over-simplify the relationship between the Un-American Committee and the film industry by picturing it either as an identity of interest or as an irreconcilable conflict. The rulers of Hollywood endorse the committee's political line, but at the same time they are disturbed by its harmful impact on their business. The motion picture companies, like other corporations, welcome the right to discharge employees for "political unreliability"; it enables them to get rid of militant trade unionists and it undermines the position of the unions. But in conferring this favor on Hollywood, the Committee disrupted production and forced the companies to dispense with the services of hundreds of talented artists.

The sensational fanfare of publicity accompanying the "investigations" is far from desirable for an industry that is sensitive to public relations. Hollywood sees grave disadvantages in political censorship, and responsible executives resent the silly charge that they do not recognize "subversive ideas" in pictures under their supervision.

The Committee's emphasis on content is the most essential part of its work: therefore, it involves the sharpest contradictions. On the one hand, it invades the jurisdiction of "free enterprise" and substitutes the judgment of ignorant politicians for the judgment of men trained in profitable film-making. On the other hand, the producers must accept the interference, for they could not make the shift in content to blatant war-mongering and anti-democratic

propaganda without the political assistance provided by the committee, and the witch hunts and trials of which the committee's work is a part.

The problem does not arise from any unwillingness on the part of Hollywood to make reactionary pictures. The half-century of the film industry's development coincides with the epoch of imperialism, and its course has been determined in the main by the "cultural" interests and requirements of its corporate masters. Propaganda for war and conquest, for "white supremacy" and the oppression of colonial peoples, has characterized the history of the motion picture in the United States, from *Tearing Down the Spanish Flag* in 1898 to the latest Korean war film.

However, there have been many changes in the policies of the bourgeoisie during these years. The movement of social and economic forces that has made these changes necessary, has exerted a corresponding influence on the content of films. Hollywood reflected, although in a limited and generally distorted form, the tremendous popular pressures and advances of the Roosevelt period.

The development of an aggressive plan for the United States to control the world by military force after the end of World War II required a rapid reorientation of the dominant culture. The most dramatic change took place in attitudes toward the Soviet Union: almost over night, the heroic sacrifices of the Soviet people in our common struggle were forgotten, and the nation which had contributed most unstintingly to the defeat of our enemies was suddenly pictured as "the enemy."

A similar transformation was engineered in every field of social and political thought. The drive against freedom of speech and association was basically designed to suppress opposition to the war program and assure the "tranquility" of the home front when the cold war became hot. This could not be accomplished without destroying the gains made by the labor movement and by the organized activities of the people during the Roosevelt years—which in turn required the destruction of the *ideas* that reflected these gains and activities.

The first step in reorganizing the motion picture industry to meet the requirements of the new period was the attack on the Holly-

wood trade unions and the annihilation of the most progressive trade union forces, in 1945 and 1946. But the change in the content of films did not proceed rapidly enough to meet the demands of Washington and Wall Street. The film-makers could not make the change arbitrarily, without taking account of the habits and temper of audiences. We can imagine what might have happened if some of Hollywood's recent pictures had been produced in 1947, before the first Congressional hearing. Can we doubt that there would have been a serious outburst of public anger in 1947, if theatres had shown the sympathetic portrait of a Nazi general in *The Desert Fox*, or the call for the wanton murder of women and children in *One Minute to Zero*?

Today these pictures are accepted, or at least tolerated. The Un-Americans in Congress can claim some of the credit for the change.

3. the function of film in a class society

A GUIDE TO understanding the function of culture is provided by the Marxist-Leninist analysis of the economic base of society and the superstructure of institutions and ideas erected upon it. Marx states the principle in his preface to *The Critique of Political Economy*:

"In the social production of their means of existence men enter into definite, necessary relations which are independent of their will, production relationships which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The aggregate of these production relationships constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a juridical and political superstructure arises, and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of the material means of existence conditions

the whole process of social, political and intellectual life."^{*}

In the course of his discussion of linguistics, Stalin elucidates the relationship between the base and the superstructure:

"Every base has its own superstructure, corresponding to it. If the base changes or is eliminated, then following this its superstructure changes or is eliminated; if a new base arises, then following this a superstructure arises corresponding to it. . . .

"The base creates the superstructure precisely in order that it may serve it, that it may actively help it to take shape and consolidate itself. . . . The superstructure has only to renounce its role of auxiliary, it has only to pass from a position of active defense of its base to one of indifference toward it, to adopt the same attitude to all classes, and it loses its virtue and ceases to be a superstructure."^{**}

The ruling class of the United States, desperately seeking to maintain its rule, will of course not permit the superstructure "to renounce its role of auxiliary . . . to adopt the same attitude toward all classes."

All forms of communication, all phases of art, science and thought, are coordinated in "active defense" of the threatened interests of the bourgeoisie. But many intellectuals remain under the spell of old illusions concerning the function of culture. Artists and writers insist that their work remains unaffected by class pressures, that it is born of their own inner consciousness, dedicated to purely aesthetic values. Formalist tendencies, growing out of and fortifying these illusions, are frequently championed by artists whose social and political views are progressive.

The conception that art in class society is "free" has an understandable appeal to cultural workers. Artists who accept the fiction are able to deny in their own minds the forces which shape their thought and work, to avoid their full social responsibility and to blur the class character of their art. The enormous pressure ex-

^{*} A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.

^{**} Marxism and Linguistics, New York, 1951, pp. 9-10.

erted by the ruling class on cultural activity, expressed most directly in the threat that intellectuals conform or risk exile from their professions and possible imprisonment, impels many artists and writers to seek some fiction which will at least *lessen* their responsibility, placing them on the fringes of the battle and not in the center of the fray.

It is not surprising that theories of the "special role" and "democratic function" of culture tend to cluster around the motion picture—precisely because the film is today an important part of the superstructure, utilized with special care and attention by the ruling class. It is an area of maximum pressure for total conformity to the ruling class program; at the same time, the belief that Hollywood provides "pure entertainment" is assiduously cultivated by propagandists for the *status quo*. We are constantly told that the subject-matter of films is designed solely to meet the tastes of the mass audience, and that "the people" are the arbiters of the entertainment they receive.

The only study of Hollywood motion pictures which makes full and competent use of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the function of culture is V. J. Jerome's pamphlet, *The Negro in Hollywood Films*, first published in 1950. Here is a brilliant analysis of the first cycle of "Negro interest" films, *Home of the Brave*, *Lost Boundaries*, *Pinky* and *Intruder in the Dust*. Jerome examines these films in relation to the essential function of the motion picture in a class society: he points out that Hollywood production "serves monopoly, not only as a source of colossal profits, but as one of its most potent ideological weapons to master the minds of millions."

Jerome notes that the tendency to regard the profit-motive as the sole determinant of the content of pictures stems from the one-sided view that film is simply a commodity governed by the laws of commodity production. The film is ideology. Wall Street is unquestionably interested in profits. The monopoly structure of the industry has the effect of protecting the overall rate of profit from production, distribution and exhibition: competition is restricted; monopoly control of the largest and best located theatres enables the producers to squeeze the small exhibitor for the benefit of the big chains, and limits the public's freedom to choose what it will see on the screen.

Box office pressure can be effective if it is based on a well-organized popular movement, led by trade unions and people's organizations and consciously aware that there can be no real "freedom of the screen" as long as it is under monopoly control. A campaign along these lines can expose the utilization of motion pictures as propaganda for war and fascism, and compel certain changes in film content.

Jerome's detailed study of the first pictures in which Hollywood has taken a serious approach to Negro themes provides the theoretical groundwork for a realistic campaign to force the industry to abandon its Jim Crow practices and its abominable racist stereotypes. Jerome does not underestimate the significance of the "New Look" films. He observes that, "in each of the four motion pictures, we get the formal outward aspect of a serious and dignified representation of the Negro, in a full-drawn central role." He continues:

"So obviously does this represent a sharp departure from Hollywood's past patterns that, to those who are content with first impressions, these films constitute nothing short of a revolutionary change. Regardless of what must be said in criticism—and what must be said here is *fundamental* criticism—it would be anything but realistic not to see in this new screen depiction of the Negro the fact that the advancing movement of the Negro people, together with their white labor and progressive allies, has forced a new tactical concession from the enemy. At the same time, it would be even more unrealistic not to see in this very concession a new mode—more dangerous because more subtle—through which the racist ruling class of our country is today re-asserting its strategic ideology of 'white supremacy' on the Hollywood screen."^{*}

Jerome proceeds to dissect the structure and content of the four pictures, offering detailed proof that, "taken together, they constitute a new cycle of films that seem to arm, but actually attempt to disarm, the Negro people's movement, that seem to promote

the Negro-and-white alliance, but actually attempt to set divisions between Negro and white." The author emphasizes the fact that the films consistently follow the viewpoint of the white ruling class, denying "the objective existence of the Negro question, by making lynching appear a 'moral' problem of the 'better class' whites." In terms of white audiences, "the white spectator is taught to regard the Negro people as 'unfortunate' beings, toward whom the whites should exercise tolerance'.^{*}"

Since these films represent a tactical concession to the Negro liberation movement, which is designed to distort the real issues of the struggle and thus undermine the unity and strength of the Negro people and their white allies, the exposure of the content and purpose of the film is the best means of forcing Hollywood to make more substantial concessions and to give some genuine acknowledgment to the Negro people's demand for full equality in jobs, housing, education, and in every phase of the nation's life.

Jerome's pamphlet has been extensively read and widely praised here and abroad. But its deeper theoretical implications have been inadequately recognized. These implications are contained in the section of the work entitled "A Class Approach," in which Jerome annihilates the notion that the film is "inherently a progressive art," or that it "must develop by its own inner laws into a progressive cultural weapon." The motion picture has potentialities as a people's art—when it is controlled by the people and serves their interests. But no such democratization of the art is possible under capitalism. The mass audience to which the Hollywood product is offered provides a social base for the film, but this must not be confused with the political content of the screen fare. Jerome shows that the mass appeal of the film, far from guaranteeing its evolution as a people's art, makes it supremely important to the class that controls production as an ideological weapon to influence the minds of millions.

In stressing the importance of Jerome's contribution, I must point out that the errors he attacks may be found in my own critical writings in the period from 1945 to 1949, and especially in the

^{*} *Ibid.*, pp. 48-51.

^{*} *The Negro in Hollywood Films*, p. 21.

revised edition of my book, *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting*, published in 1949.

The book is a useful analysis of the social forces that have shaped the development of drama and film, and the social concepts underlying dramatic form and story structure. But my study of the history of the film in the United States and of the issues arising out of the Un-American Committee's attack, fails to recognize the class forces that have controlled Hollywood production from its small beginnings to its present world influence. The scope of the error is exposed in the over-optimistic statement that "there can be no permanent interference with the development of the American motion picture as a people's art."^{*}

The lack of foresight in this prediction was sufficiently apparent in 1949. It is even more painfully evident in 1953.

Although Jerome does not mention my book by name, he refers to it when he speaks of "the error of viewing the motion picture medium as inherently a people's art, or as an art form that must develop by its own inner laws into a progressive cultural weapon."^{**}

In order to illustrate the "no class" approach to the motion picture, Jerome cites an article by a film reviewer in the *Daily People's World* of San Francisco. The reviewer speaks of the "scornfully immature attitude toward the cinema" of those who see "Hollywood only as a corrupt institution, the source of nightmares of decadence and ideas of reaction." As an example of this "immaturity," the reviewer quotes Maxim Gorky's prophecy in 1896 concerning the future of the film under capitalism:

"Rather than serve science and aid in the perfection of man, it will serve the Nizhni Novgorod Fair and help to popularize debauchery. . . . There is nothing in the world so great and beautiful but that man can vulgarize and dishonor it. And, even in the clouds, where formerly ideals and dreams dwelt, they now want to print advertisements—for improved toilets, I suppose."

Jerome notes that the reviewer dismisses these wonderfully pro-

^{*} *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting*, p. 361.

^{**} *The Negro in Hollywood Films*, pp. 54-55.

phetic words: "Gorky, in 1896," according to the critic, "could not yet see the possibility of the film's development as a creative weapon in the hands of the artist." Jerome asks a pertinent question:

"Where amid the constant rubbish ground out by the bourgeois film-mills of Hollywood is there evidence today of 'a creative weapon in the hands of the artist?' Weapon?—yes! But it is neither creative nor in the hands of the artist. It is destructive and in the hands of monopolists."

Jerome might have added that the writer in the *People's World* uses my book as his authority: "There is a profound difference," says the reviewer, "between Gorky's pessimistic prophecy and John Howard Lawson's—the motion picture is an art and an industry. It is also a unique social force bringing cultural experience to millions of people, offering an interpretation of life that affects their beliefs, habits and emotional attitudes."

It may seem ungenerous to reject this compliment belatedly, three years after it was offered. But it is necessary to clear the record, and to define my responsibility for ideas which I endorsed and helped to disseminate. I am not one of those who hold that the "integrity of the artist" is best served by ignoring mistakes, nor can I accept the view that the artist's role or special sensitivity makes him immune to criticism.

It is symptomatic of the general level of Marxist criticism in the United States, that, aside from Jerome's comment, my work on playwriting and screenwriting has been favorably reviewed and uncritically accepted without discussion of its erroneous formulations. It is left to the author to acknowledge his shortcomings four years after publication.

Although I accept full responsibility for the error, it is not solely my own. As the *People's World* reviewer suggests, my book reflected moods and opinions which were, and to some extent still are, prevalent among writers and artists of the left.

There is indeed "a profound difference" between Gorky's vision of the future course of film history and my description of motion

pictures as "a unique social force." It is the difference between cogent insight into the way in which the bourgeoisie degrades culture to serve its class interest, and a bourgeois-liberal approach that obscures class forces in a veil of generalizations about "interpretation of life" and "emotional attitudes."

We cannot afford the luxury of such generalizations in this crucial period of ideological struggle. The artist who ignores the class struggle in the field of art abandons the field to the enemy. We must examine the film and all forms of art and communication as class weapons, serving a specific purpose in the cultural superstructure of capitalism.

Part II

THE SOCIAL PATTERN OF HOLLYWOOD FILMS

1. the gangster becomes a soldier

HOLLYWOOD PRODUCES FILMS which cover a wide variety of subject-matter and setting. But a major trend in the past five years has been the growing emphasis on sex and murder (or attempted murder and attempted sex) as thematic material.

There is a similar trend in radio and television, in books, magazines, and in the comic strips. The cycle of pornography and gangsterism gives a false picture of American life, and tends to blunt the moral sense of the audience. The portrayal of brutes and sadists as "attractive" figures, and even as "heroes," is connected with the war drive. The connection becomes clear as the earlier pattern of sex and violence evolves toward direct propaganda for war and fascist regimentation.

The "simple" theme of murder presented as entertainment, is exemplified in *White Heat*, in which James Cagney starred in 1949. Cagney plays the part of a psychopathic killer who commits six or eight murders—some of them bloody acts of unmotivated fury against his own friends. Other pictures produced at about the same time are no less brutal than *White Heat*; for example, *Kiss of Death*, also portraying a maniacal murderer, has a scene in which Richard Widmark hurls a crippled old woman in a wheel chair down a flight of stairs to her death.

But the anti-social message of *White Heat* made an unforgettable impression upon me, because I saw it as an inmate of a federal prison, enjoying the Saturday night film-showing with my fellow prisoners. There are many decent, well-intentioned people in prison; many who recognize that the forces which drove them to vice or crime are inherent in our present social system. Related to this partial understanding is a deep bitterness, a feeling that the individual has no chance in a jungle society unless he adopts the ways of the jungle.

White Heat idealizes this code of the jungle, and advertises it as a "way of life." It made a strong impression on the prison inmates, especially on the younger men. There were long discussions after the showing: one could insist that Cagney is characterized as a madman in the picture. But Cagney is a famous actor. The prison audience—and this is probably true of other audiences—associated the fictitious character with Cagney's reputation. The spectators saw him as an attractive symbol of *toughness*, defending himself against a cruel and irrational society: "At least," it was said, "he has the guts to stand up and fight back!"

This emphasis on the individual's total depravity in a depraved society rejects the possibility of rational social cooperation. Man is doomed to prowl alone, a beast in the jungle. However, there is one way in which the killer instinct can be utilized or sublimated: it can perform a necessary and even a "holy" purpose, if it is subjected to absolute authority, disciplined to serve the needs of war.

In *Twelve O'clock High*, another film produced in 1949, we have an important step in Hollywood's development of the Nazi theory that training for war, enforced by the will of a "superior" class and accepted without question by "inferiors," is the highest aim to which we can aspire.

Superficially, there seems to be no connection between the sensitive, patriotic officer played by Gregory Peck in *Twelve O'clock High* and the murderer in *White Heat*. But the undisciplined killer in *White Heat* explains and supplements the disciplined and "socially desirable" brutality in *Twelve O'clock High*. In the latter picture, the story is told from the viewpoint of an "average" middle class man, first shown as a civilian in the years after World War II. He goes back to the deserted airfield in England where he passed the first years of the war. He remembers the terrible days when the small and badly equipped group of fliers from the United States undertook the task of day-light precision bombing of German targets. We see Gregory Peck, as the officer charged with the responsibility of whipping the demoralized men into an effective force, introducing iron and inhuman discipline. There is no talk about *morale* or the aims of the war. Peck tells the men they must expect to be killed, their only aim is to accomplish the greatest possible destruction before they die.

The hero of *Twelve O'clock High* forces his men and himself to learn the lesson implicit in *White Heat* and other gangster films—that it is man's destiny to kill or be killed. It is a difficult lesson: the hero himself breaks down and goes temporarily insane under the weight of the responsibilities placed upon him. The breakdown is a concession to the sensibilities of the public, which was not prepared in 1949 to accept the view that blind obedience to officers and readiness to die without asking questions are the highest privileges of citizens. Nonetheless, the hero of *Twelve O'clock High* overcomes his own softness in order to master his men.

Twelve O'clock High ends where it began. A man stands alone on an empty airfield, looking back with nostalgia to the great days of hard devotion to death. Twentieth Century-Fox, the company which produced the picture, seems to have engaged in similar meditations: the result was the production, two years later, of *The Desert Fox*, in which the thesis of the earlier film is translated into political terms. The glorification of Nazi methods and ideas is now offered without apologies: one of Hitler's leading generals becomes the hero of a Hollywood film.*

The Desert Fox shocked the world. It offered proof of the threat of fascism in the United States. To be sure, the film derides Hitler, but the treatment of the German Fuehrer reinforces the Nazi theory that the killer-instinct is inherent in human nature and can be controlled only by the authority of an elite class. Hitler is the killer who gets out of hand and betrays the interests of the class that put him in power. Thus, the "good" Nazis, whose reliance on war as an instrument of policy was intended to "contain Communism" and crush the Soviet Union, are separated from the "madman" who was so unwise as to wage war against the United States.

Rommel, as depicted in the film, combines military prowess with all the virtues of middle class family life. He has a charming home,

* The direct effect of such films on juvenile crime is indicated in a dispatch from Tacoma, Wash., which tells of an 18-year old youth, William Barclay Bracey, who killed his mother with a .22 caliber rifle. Bracey told Sheriff Harold Bird that he worshipped Rommel, and had seen *The Desert Fox* over and over again. (*People's World*, San Francisco, May 19, 1953).

and there are scenes *ad nauseam* which show his love for his wife, his devotion to his son. These scenes serve to create sympathy for Rommel and his friends, who have no objection to killing six million Jews, and break with Hitler only when they see that their class interest requires an alliance with Wall Street. The meaning of this alliance is defined in the ending of the film. It closes with a speech by Winston Churchill in which he pays tribute to Rommel as "a gallant enemy," regretting that there is "little room for chivalry in the wars of the great democratic nations of today."

These words at the conclusion of *The Desert Fox* point directly to the Hollywood pictures portraying the Korean battlefield. The new war films illustrate Churchill's reference to "wars of the great democratic nations": there is in truth "little room for chivalry" in Korea. Cinematic representation of the current conflict offers an interesting contrast to the treatment of front line combat in the pictures of the Second World War produced less than a decade ago. In a *New York Times* review of Hollywood's tribute to Rommel, Bosley Crowther observes that it is "hard to believe that less than nine years . . . stand between the premises of *Desert Victory* and *Desert Fox*." He wonders how "moral judgments so acute at the time could have been so quickly reversed."^o

The change in moral values is noteworthy, but the seeds of the change may be found in the films of the period from 1941 to 1945, which provide a fairly accurate gauge of the aims and attitudes of the ruling class of the United States in the world struggle against fascism. It was essential to defeat Germany and Japan, but the financial power which guided political and military policy remained committed to the strategy of imperialism, limiting cooperation with the Soviet Union, and plotting to undermine the conditions for a stable and democratic peace. At the same time, the people of the United States were affected by the anti-fascist character of the war and the possibilities of international friendship in the post-war period.

Hollywood made a few films which reflected, to a limited extent, the change in world relationships arising from the war. But in the main, production proceeded on a business-as-usual basis, with

^o *New York Times*, October 28, 1951.

surprisingly little change in social viewpoint or choice of material. It is estimated that about four percent of the industry's production in 1942, 1943, and 1944 dealt with significant aspects of the world conflict.^{*} Even in these pictures, the democratic content was limited by shallow characterizations, cheap sentiment, racist stereotypes. Battlefield scenes suggested that men fight better when they know what they are fighting for, but brutality and arbitrary discipline were also stressed.

Thus there is a bridge between the films of the Second World War and the far more banal and indecent pictures of the present conflict in the East. The transition may be examined in one of the earliest pictures of the Korean fighting, *The Steel Helmet*. Samuel Fuller, who made the picture, followed the formula that had proved successful in World War II: the tough sergeant, the Negro G.I. and the soldier of Japanese descent are familiar types; their jokes and complaints and courage suggest that they are good men united in a good cause. When they capture a North Korean Major, they argue with him about the meaning of the war. The prisoner, being a Communist, speaks of discrimination against the Negro people in the United States. The Negro soldier answers that improvement takes time, "perhaps it will be better in twenty years." The scene develops as an embarrassing and fruitless attempt to find "democratic" arguments; talk of brotherhood and human rights that was natural in the anti-fascist war is utterly impossible in the Korean situation. The prisoner has the best of the argument; the sergeant, resenting the prisoner's logic and tired of conversation, shoots the North Korean in cold blood.

The conclusion of the scene marked the conclusion of an epoch in the history of Hollywood thought. There was to be no more talk of human aspirations or national social objectives. The sergeant's act of irrational brutality set the pattern of the war films that followed: the "mad killer" of gangster pictures finds a mission on the Korean battle-front. His insanity becomes "patriotism."

Sam Fuller, having learned from his experience with *The Steel Helmet*, produced *Fixed Bayonets* in 1951. The theme is a young

^{*} Dorothy B. Jones, "Hollywood War Films: 1942-1944," *Hollywood Quarterly*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, October, 1944.

soldier's unwillingness to kill, his final conquest of fear and emergence as a hero. The rejection of any pretense of a "democratic" viewpoint is indicated in the treatment of officers: in the films made in the early nineteen-forties, the ordinary G.I. was presented as a model of heroism. But *Fixed Bayonets* opens with a group of generals in conference at the front; they are tough men of action, enduring all the hardships of combat in the lines; indeed, they look a little like Bill Mauldin's cartoons of privates and corporals in the Second World War. The fact that the population of Korea hates the invaders is accentuated in *Fixed Bayonets*: the soldiers express their fear of the people around them. One of the men says that he can "smell Koreans." In order to avoid insulting epithets, the film refers to the unfriendly civilians simply as *people*: "People . . . people are all around us."

Fixed Bayonets presents its propaganda lesson with a crude violence which impresses Manny Farber of the *Nation* as genuine art. He describes it as "Sam Fuller's jagged, suspenseful, off-beat variant of a Mauldin cartoon. . . . Funny, morbid, the best war film since 'Bataan.' I wouldn't mind seeing it seven times."*

Farber's desire to see the same film seven times has been gratified; his duties as a reviewer have forced him to see the same formula repeated in a cycle of war films which reached a nadir of brutality and imbecility in *Retreat Hell*. The attempt in this picture to depict the retreat from the Yalu River as a victory gives an air of unreality and false bravado to the story of the young soldier who learns to conquer his timidity and "becomes a man." As in other films of the type, the heroic figures are officers—in this case a colonel and a captain.

Since the picture deals with one of the worst defeats ever suffered by the armies of the United States, and since it cannot face the reasons for the disaster or even admit it *was* a disaster, *Retreat Hell* is as empty as its title. Military *morale* is reduced to a bit of lying profanity: the soldier must fight and die in a bloody vacuum, without even considering whether his commanders order him to move forward or backward. In two years, from *Steel Helmet* to *Retreat Hell*, Hollywood has eliminated all reference to moral issues

* *The Nation*, January 5, 1952.

or rational purpose from its portrayal of war. The Nazi theory of total obedience as the soldier's fate and glory is fully embodied in these Korean films.

This is as far as the combat picture can go. But it is necessary to go further—the military killer must also be prepared to kill civilians without qualm. In *One Minute to Zero*, the climax of the story shows an infantry Colonel's decision to slaughter a refugee column of Korean women and children, because Communists have infiltrated the column. The mass murder shown on the screen is Hollywood's first endorsement of the methods of wanton destruction adopted by Hitler.

The lesson is carried forward in *Thunder in the East*, which deals with the "conversion" of a pacifist, an Indian follower of Gandhi, to the Nazi creed of blood. At the conclusion of the film, the former pacifist fires a machine gun into a crowd of advancing "revolutionists." In order to increase the intensity of the ending, the fade-out shows the killer firing directly into the audience. There could be no more fitting statement of the purpose of these films. The audience is indeed the target, marked for destruction by the forces which decree this inhuman propaganda.

2. Hollywood history lesson

The Red Badge of Courage is described in trailers, shown in advance on motion picture screens: "As memorable as *The Birth of a Nation* . . . nothing like it since *Gone With the Wind*."

The motives for the double comparison are obvious. M-G-M wishes to stress the relationship between its recent Civil War film and the two biggest money-makers in the history of the industry. *Gone With the Wind* is the top grosser of all time (\$26,000,000). The exact figures for *Birth of a Nation* are unknown, but it probably stands in second place.* However, there is also an ideological con-

* *Variety*, January 9, 1952.

nection between the three films which throws a good deal of light on Hollywood as a teacher of history.

The first thing that strikes us about *The Red Badge of Courage* is the fact that its theme is the same as the theme of the Korean war pictures—the education of a killer. It tells the story of one man's initiation to the horrors of battle. The youth in the picture is a raw recruit, sensitive and tortured by the fear that he will not meet the supreme test. When he finds himself facing the enemy, when men stumble past him, retreating in disorder, he is seized with panic and flees wildly with the others. When the battle is over, he comes back to the camp, and tells a false story of having fought through the engagement in another sector.

On the following day he is determined to wipe out the shame of his flight. He moves forward ahead of the line, careless of enemy fire. His unconsciousness of danger affects the other men, who follow him. As he goes forward, he is seized with a blind rage. The narrator, quoting from Stephen Crane's novel, says that he is possessed by "a great passion . . . a passion to destroy the enemy." When the bearer of the Stars and Stripes falls, the youth takes up the flag, carrying it on through smoke and fury, defying death in a march that brings victory.

After the battle is over, the young soldier again sees the beauty of trees and sky. The landscape is suddenly peaceful. According to the narration, "His soul changed . . . he rid himself of the sickness of battle." What he has experienced is a temporary, but salutary, madness. To become a man, one must learn to kill, one must be filled with an insensate rage to destroy the enemy.

There is none of the crudity of *Fixed Bayonets* in *The Red Badge of Courage*. The film is a fairly accurate adaptation of Stephen Crane's story, esteemed by critics as one of the most distinguished novels in our literature. The narration uses Crane's words. The pictorial effect of many scenes imitates the Brady photographs of the Civil War. John Huston, one of Hollywood's most intelligent writer-directors, guided the picture with emphasis on realistic detail and bits of human interest.

The Red Badge of Courage has no apparent resemblance, in theme and treatment, to the many Hollywood films which glorify the Old South and vilify the Negro people. It contains no ugly

stereotype of Negro characters, no overt arguments for "white supremacy." It does not uphold the Confederate cause in the manner of such recent pictures as *Drums in the Deep South*.

Yet *The Red Badge of Courage* makes a comment on history which is extremely valuable to today's war-makers. In transferring the education-of-a-killer theme to a Civil War background, the film tells us that the warfare to preserve the Union was as pointless and stupid as the strife in Korea.

This monstrous misrepresentation of past and present history has a double purpose: it attacks our proudest democratic traditions; at the same time, it attempts to justify the Korean aggression by saying that it is no better, and no worse, than other wars.

The Red Badge of Courage deals so exclusively with one man's experience that the youth's adventure seems abstracted from its historical context. The youth himself has no consciousness of issues. He is a blind "creature of history." His fears are as irrational as his bravery. All the other soldiers are characterized in the same way. These defenders of the Union are political morons, so devoid of attitudes or interests that they seem to have no personal history. Their lack of background is emphasized by their having no names, being designated as "The Youth," "The Tall Soldier," etc.

The treatment of the characters as people moving in a social vacuum, in which blood and death are the only realities, implies that the men in the Northern armies had no reason for fighting and no knowledge of the causes of the war.

This war in a vacuum is unrelated to the Negro struggle for liberation, the moral leadership of men like Frederick Douglass and John Brown and women like Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe, the rallying of popular forces that led to the Emancipation Proclamation. These realities were in the background of every battle, in the consciousness of men who marched to their death singing "John Brown's Body." But in the Hollywood version of the conflict, the only issue is the individual's subjective struggle with fear, his subjugation by the "passion to kill."

While the picture does not glamorize the Confederacy, it creates a mood of sympathy for the South. Early in the film, the hero is on guard duty. He walks in the moonlight near a river. A voice across

the stream warns him back; the friendly enemy does not want to shoot him.

More significant is the climax: the cinematic treatment of the battle exhibits remarkable technical virtuosity—tempo, heightening tension, dramatic force. As the protagonist moves forward carrying the flag over the bodies of the dead and dying, he finds himself in the confusion walking beside the man carrying the Confederate flag. For a moment, the two banners float side by side. Then slowly, the Confederate flag is lowered to a horizontal position—never to the dirt. The symbolism is unmistakable. The two flags are together, in victory or defeat.

No Negroes appear in the picture. The producers might attempt to justify the omission on the ground that there are no Negro characters in Stephen Crane's novel. It may also be argued that the picture is a sort of *genre* painting of a battle scene, showing the common life of a few men during a few tense days. However, the area in which the action is supposed to take place has a large Negro population. Huston originally planned to photograph the picture in Virginia or Tennessee. In this territory, the Negro people played a heroic part in aiding the Northern forces. The makers of the film could not permit a Negro character to appear on the screen. The mere presence of a Negro would have exposed the whole fraudulent structure, introducing an element of causation which the picture consciously avoids.

The relationship of the film to the novel cannot be dismissed with the general statement that it is a faithful adaptation. Although it follows the action of the book and quotes the author's words, the picture misses the anger, the sensitivity and passion, which give stature to the novel. The insights that illuminate the book are never approached in the superficial detail that passes for "realism" in the film.

But there is a deeper connection between the picture and the book. Crane was twenty-four when he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*. In spite of his youth, he was an embittered man. His bitterness reflected the social and political life of his time. The United States stood on the threshold of imperialist expansion. The novel was written in 1894, two years before the election of McKinley, four years before the Spanish-American War.

The capitalism of the Gilded Age had consolidated its economic and political power by re-establishing the plantation economy of the South, nullifying the freedom won by Negroes and poor whites during the Reconstruction period. The destruction of the democratic achievements of Reconstruction was accompanied by systematic propaganda concerning the "inferiority" of the Negro people, hatred of the foreign born, claims of "Anglo-Saxon superiority" and the "Manifest Destiny" of the United States to control the darker peoples of the world.

Crane, like many young intellectuals of the nineties, saw threatening clouds on the political horizon. But he could find no shelter from the coming storm. The corrupt power of wealth seemed invincible. Crane could find comfort only in aloof pessimism and angry despair. He was twenty-one when he wrote *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*, a story of the slums which shows life without value and death without dignity.

During the next three years, there was increasing social unrest. The great strikes at Homestead and Coeur d'Alene occurred in 1892. The panic of 1893 brought unemployment and terrible misery. National attention was centered on the Pullman strike in 1894. In the South, the growing unity of Negro and white farmers in the Populist Party was broken by the revival of the Klan and the introduction of the poll tax to keep Negroes from the polls.

This was the social setting of *The Red Badge of Courage*. Crane's attitude toward the Civil War was molded by the history he had read and the pressures of the time. At a moment when wholesale terror was being revived against the Negro people in the South, Crane avoided mention of their role in the struggle that destroyed slavery. To him, the Civil War seemed like an exercise in futility. He saw it as the birth-pangs of the chaotic society in which he lived. Like the youth in his story, he had to crush his own agonized sensitivity in order to find his place in a brutally competitive society.

Vernon Louis Parrington writes of *The Red Badge of Courage*: "The individual is caught between the external war machine and the inner instinct machine. . . . The hero is at the mercy of the crowd psychology and blind chance."* Robert E. Spiller observes

* *Main Currents in American Thought*, Vol. III, New York (1930), p. 328.

that the book offers "a naturalistic view of heroism unknown to the war romances of the time, with the possible exception of those of Bierce, but its bitterness was lost on most of its readers because the hero seemed to be following the usual formula and discovering manhood by violent action."*

Crane's Civil War narrative expressed his deep bitterness concerning the imperialist conflicts which were impending at the time he wrote. But lacking historical perspective, he posed the problem of war in terms of subjective frustration; he could not make a realistic appraisal of the social and economic forces that lay behind the imperialist rivalries of the late nineteenth century. It was ironic that the reputation achieved through *The Red Badge of Courage* brought him employment as a newspaper correspondent in the Greco-Turkish War in 1897, and the Spanish-American War in 1898. It is a further irony that his war experience brought the illness that caused his death in 1900, when he was only thirty years old.

The crowning irony is the Hollywood use of his novel half a century later, to justify the later stage of the imperialist policies which over-shadowed, and in a sense ended, Crane's life.

John Huston's role as director of the picture is also a study in ironic contradictions. Huston seems to have been drawn to the book by an emotional identification with Crane's viewpoint—hatred of war and of the forces which make wars. In Huston's case, even more than in Crane's, these forces overshadow the artist's life and defeat his purpose. They are, as a matter of fact, Huston's employers.

Lillian Ross has written a devastatingly detailed account of the making of *The Red Badge of Courage*, from the unwritten plan in Huston's mind to the first public showing. Miss Ross attended story conferences, spent much time with Gottfried Reinhardt, the producer, as well as with Dory Schary, the head of the studio, and other executives. She talked to actors and technicians. She went with the company on location. She went through the dismal routine of Hollywood parties, recording the words of fear and

* *Literary History of the United States*, 3 vols., New York, 1948, Vol. II, p. 1023.

malice which pass for conversation at these functions.

Her careful portrait of Huston shows a man of genuine talent, protecting himself as best he can from the indecencies of the Hollywood environment. Among his methods of self-protection are his pose of mild eccentricity, his artistic aloofness, and in the long run his mocking acceptance of his inability to control his work.

Miss Ross quotes Huston as saying that Hollywood is "a jungle"—"a closed-in, tight, frantically inbred and frantically competitive jungle." Discussing the feud between L. B. Mayer and Dory Schary for control of the M-G-M studio, Huston says: "The top rulers of the jungle are here in New York." He refers to Nicholas Schenck, president of the company, as "the real power, watching the pack close in on one or another of the lesser rulers, closing in, ready to pounce! . . . He's the real king of the pack. And he does it all from New York! God, are they tough?"*

Huston never seems to realize, at least in Miss Ross's account, that the struggle between Mayer and Schary was not solely a fight for personal power, and that Schenck's decision to support Schary was determined by considerations of policy concerning the propaganda use of films. Mayer and Schary represented conflicting policies.

Mayer was as "tough" in his approach to the content of pictures as in his handling of studio employees. He had a Neanderthal force and a kind of shrewdness which made him hated and feared by everyone. His contempt for people led him to believe that there is no limit to the gullibility of the audience. He was convinced that anything can be sold if it is offered with enough glamor and sentiment.

Mayer's formula worked well during most of the twenty-six years in which he had a large measure of control over production at M-G-M. When film-makers attempted to reflect certain aspects of the New Deal, Mayer was able to cheapen and standardize the material so as to deprive it of any democratic meaning. His hatred of ideas and his shoddy "showmanship" served Wall Street well during the Second World War. He was able to make films appeal-

* All quotations from Miss Ross are from a series of articles in *The New Yorker*, May 24 to June 21, 1952.

ing to the patriotic sentiment of the people without touching any of the realities of the anti-fascist struggle.

Mayer proved incapable of grasping the more complex requirements of propaganda in the present crisis of United States imperialism. His ability to gauge box office values began to fail, and there was a decline in the profits of M-G-M films. Wall Street's worries about the finances of the company were linked to the search for new ways to popularize Wall Street's preparations for war. The problem that faced M-G-M engrossed all the major companies. Hollywood had to achieve a "New Look," which would give an appearance of peaceful intent and social responsibility to its propaganda for war and fascism. Schary came to M-G-M as a specialist in the "New Look."

Mayer's hatred of ideas and his belief that all audiences are composed of morons made him contemptuous of Schary's intellectual pretensions and suspicious of his synthetic "liberalism." *The Red Badge of Courage* was a main issue in the dispute between Mayer and Schary. Mayer's opposition to the film was so strong that it could not be released until he was forced out of the administration of the company. Mayer felt that the movies had done a good job of glamorizing war, and he saw no point in changing the formula.

Huston's dream of making a film about the futility of military sacrifice gave Mayer the jitters. Schary was unperturbed. Huston could go as far as he liked in showing the "futility" of the Northern cause in the Civil War. Schary was shrewd enough to know that the heart of the film's meaning lay in its interpretation of history.

Huston, like many intellectuals, lacked any deep understanding or conviction about the nation's past. He was content to accept the studio's specific instructions that there must be no reference in the film to the real issues of the Civil War.

Miss Ross cites the director's instructions to Harold Rossen, his cameraman: "His war in the movies must not appear to be a North vs. South war but a war showing the pointlessness of the Youth's courage in helping to capture, near the end of the picture, a fragment of wall." Huston's assistant gave orders that the conflict must at all times be referred to as "the war between the States. The studio says you can't call it the Civil War."

Having accepted this misrepresentation of history, Huston concentrated on the inwardness of the youth's experience. But his definition of the theme—"the pointlessness of the youth's courage"—made the drama negative and meaningless. The difficulty was suggested in a memorandum submitted by a psychologist who was asked to read the script:

"Of course, it is presupposed dramaturgically that the psychosis of fear is taken as a fact. . . . Since the motives of his heroism are of purely psychopathic origin, it should be stated that the filmic description of the psychological evolution fails to convince at important moments."

According to Miss Ross, "Huston and Reinhardt read the analysis, exchanged blank looks, and had it filed." Nevertheless, the psychologist, using the involved language of his craft, posed a problem that could not be filed. Preview audiences were more explicit than the psychologist in stating that the film failed "to convince." Disapproval of spectators at the first preview led to minor revisions, but the second preview was equally unsuccessful.

Schary was now ready to take over control of the film. He proposed to supply the missing story value by a narration which would give weight and meaning to the youth's action—the political meaning that Schary wanted to supply. Schary's plan was facilitated by Huston's departure for Africa to make another picture, but the writer-director could not have prevented the changes under any circumstances.

Schary wrote an introductory statement which transformed the film's theme. The narrator explains that "Crane wrote the book at the age of twenty-two. Its publication made him a man. . . . His story is of a boy, who, frightened, went into a battle and came out of it a man with courage." The passage uses the prestige of the novel to build up the education-of-a-killer motif, which is compared to the creative act of writing a book. Miss Ross observes that "Huston's idea of the theme of the movie, which was simply that courage is as unreasoning as cowardice, was not alluded to in the introduction."

Reinhardt wrote sadly to Huston:

"I pray that the discrepancy between what it should be and what it is is not too great. . . . I believe in sincerity and friendship and talent. Yet I realize that these three priceless qualities can be easily defeated by geography and power."

Geography had little to do with the matter. Huston would have been as helpless in Scharf's Culver City office as he was in Africa. Power was decisive.*

Scharf's work on *The Red Badge of Courage* coincided with the final stages of his struggle with L. B. Mayer, and it was undoubtedly a factor in securing Wall Street's endorsement of Scharf's policy. Mayer left the company in June, 1951, and the film was released a few months later. It was not a box office success, but it performed its propaganda function. It won critical acclaim and appealed to intellectuals. It gave the stamp of "artistic sincerity" to the idea that men fight because blood and violence bring "psychological release." It did its bit to undermine faith in democracy, to cultivate disillusionment about one of the proudest struggles of the nation's past, and to promote a Jim Crow theory of history.

When Huston returned to the United States, he wore the shield of indifference that serves him so well in the Hollywood jungle. "I lied to Dory," he said to Reinhardt, "I called Dory up and said I had seen the picture. I told him I approved of everything he had done."

Underlying the words is a tragedy of wasted talent.

3. celluloid revolution

THE APPEARANCE OF *Viva Zapata!* early in 1952 caused the usual controversy, and more than the usual confusion, concerning Holly-

* Power was also decisive in the case of Reinhardt, who was dismissed from the studio where he had been employed for many years, a few months after the publication of the *New Yorker* articles in which his comments on the production were quoted.

wood's ability to deal honestly with important social themes. In this case, there can be no question that the theme is significant.

The film portrays the revolutionary movement of the peasants of Mexico led by Emiliano Zapata in the second decade of the twentieth century. Zapata is one of the great figures in the history of Mexico, and of the Americas. The most farsighted and consistent leader of the Mexican Revolution, he created a tradition that is still a vital force in the culture and political life of the Western Hemisphere.

The picture was hailed by some critics as an honest and sympathetic portrait of Zapata, and as a powerful presentation of the peasant struggle for land and liberty. Some progressives, while noting that the film has weaknesses, greeted it as a genuinely progressive achievement, a contribution to our understanding of the spirit and strength of a people's movement.

If the applause is merited, *Viva Zapata!* is an astonishing phenomenon—disproving what we have said about Hollywood, and showing that we have done the motion picture industry an injustice. The agrarian revolt led by Zapata was essentially anti-imperialist, and the events have far-reaching present-day implications. If the struggle is presented with sympathy and respect, it means that the film monopolists have defied the official foreign policy of the United States government. While the rulers of our country burn Korean villages, aid the suppression of peasant movements in Indo-China and Malaya, support anti-democratic regimes in all parts of the world, and increase the heavy burdens imposed on the people of Latin America by Yankee imperialism, Hollywood asserts the peasants' right to land and liberty and honors the struggles of oppressed peoples!

Critical appraisal of *Viva Zapata!* must be based upon the film itself, the cinematic images and sound-track which project its structure and meaning as a work of art. But in examining the picture, it is essential to consider a number of pertinent facts which have a bearing on the finished work—the circumstances of its production, the intention of its makers, its relationship to the industry's present policies.

Viva Zapata! was written by John Steinbeck, directed by Elia Kazan, produced by Darryl Zanuck for Twentieth Century-Fox.

The political purpose of the film has been outlined by Kazan, in two letters to the *Saturday Review*, and in testimony before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The director's first communication appeared in the *Saturday Review* of April 5, 1952. Five days later, he appeared as an informer before the House Committee.*

We are accustomed by this time to the dreary spectacle of frightened men and women, who lie and supplicate and repent, denying all that is decent in their professional and personal lives in order to secure absolution from the ignorant politicians who have become the arbiters of culture in the United States. But Kazan seemed determined to outdo other informers, in treachery to his friends and in personal abasement. In addition to supplying the committee with names, Kazan offered an affidavit in which he provided "a list of my entire professional career as a director, all the plays I have done and the films I have made." We may recall the Authors' League warning in 1947 that the Un-Americans arrogate to themselves the right to destroy "the whole corpus of a man's work, past and future." In Kazan's case, the artist destroys himself, submitting his professional life to the inquisitors and promising total submission in the future.

Kazan listed twenty-five plays and films, each accompanied by a note of apology—"No politics" . . . "almost everybody liked this except the Communists" . . . "shows the exact opposite of the Communist libels on America" . . . "not political," etc.

Kazan's conduct is of some interest as a case-history of moral degradation. But we are less concerned with his personal infamy than with the cultural and social pattern of which it is a part. *Viva Zapata!* cannot be divorced from Kazan's testimony before the Un-Americans. The director emphasizes the connection. His affidavit says: "This is an anti-Communist picture. Please see my article on political aspects of this picture in the *Saturday Review*

* Hollywood methods of production place major responsibility on the director. It therefore seems proper to place special emphasis on Kazan's viewpoint toward the picture, and his explanation of his own work. Kazan makes frequent mention of Steinbeck and indicates that the writer and director were in agreement. Both, of course, were accountable to Zanuck, who acted as the direct representative of the corporation.

of April 5, which I forwarded to your investigator, Mr. Nixon."* (Not only does the artist submit his work to the Congressional Gestapo; his comments on the work are slanted for their approval, submitted with due reverence.)

Let us examine Kazan's evidence, laid before the enemies of democracy as proof that *Viva Zapata!* has no democratic taint. Kazan begins his letter to the *Saturday Review* with a comment on "the political tensions that bore down on us—John Steinbeck and Darryl Zanuck and me—as we thought about and shaped a historical picture." The tensions, according to Kazan, related to one point in Zapata's career:

"What fascinated us about Zapata was one nakedly dramatic act. In the moment of victory, he turned his back on power. In that moment, in the capital with his ragged troops, Zapata could have made himself president, dictator, caudillo. Instead, abruptly, and without explanation, he rode back to his village. . . . We felt this act of renunciation was the high point in our story and the key to Zapata himself."

In the first place, we must ask whether this situation is historically accurate? In the second place, why was the incident selected as the crux of the Zapata story?

The act of renunciation which fascinated Kazan and Steinbeck, not to mention Zanuck, is an irresponsible fabrication. There is no mystery, and no hint of renunciation, in Zapata's departure from his capital. He could not hold power because the forces arrayed against him were too strong. Among these forces was the military might of the United States, which threatened Zapata with full-scale armed intervention.

In a letter to the *Saturday Review*, Carleton Beals points out that Kazan's version of the retreat from Mexico City is an "absurd concept." Beals observes that "Zapata committed no such gross betrayal of his followers. . . . He was in a trap with powerful armies closing in on him. . . . Zapata was outnumbered ten

* Official transcript of Hearings, April 10, 1952.

to one. When he rode out of the National Palace that last time, rifle fire and artillery were shaking Mexico City."

In reply to Beals, Kazan asserts that research for the picture "was extensive," but "I never did hear the version Mr. Beals tells."* This is an alarming commentary on techniques of film research. Kazan could not have picked up any reputable history of the period without finding that Zapata's position in Mexico City was threatened by Carranza's army to the east, Gonzales' troops to the south; and the far more modern and well-equipped army of Obregon, backed by the White House, stood at Puebla within striking distance of the capital.

The essence of Zapata's life is summarized by Frank Tannenbaum, a bourgeois scholar whose books on the Mexican revolution must be known to Kazan: "From the day he rose in rebellion to the day he was killed, he never surrendered, never was defeated, never stopped fighting."** It is the real Zapata, the unconquerable hero of the revolution, whose grave in Southern Mexico is a sacred shrine to the people of his country.

Kazan and Steinbeck, and their modest co-worker Zanuck, were blind to historical facts, because the facts did not fit their political purpose. They wanted a hero who surrenders. "In a moment of decision," according to Kazan, "this taciturn, untaught leader, must have felt, freshly and deeply, the impact of the ancient law: power corrupts. And he refused power." Underlying this phony philosophy, which Carleton Beals describes as "eye-wash," lies the hard core of the film's political meaning. Every struggle for human rights involves the question of power. If power is an absolute source of corruption, if it must be renounced by every honest leader, the people are doomed to eternal submission. The "ancient law," presented as the central theme of *Viva Zapata!*, denies any possibility of the rational use of power for democratic and socially constructive ends.

At a time when colonial peoples are throwing off the yoke of poverty and oppression, it is not possible to deny that these great popular movements exist. It is possible, however, to deal sympa-

thetically with the "futility" of revolt, to lament the "inevitable betrayal" of the revolution by those leaders who demand fundamental changes in the system of exploitation. This service to imperialism occupies the lives of whole regiments of scholars in the fields of sociology, political economy and history.

Hollywood selects a moment of Mexican history for its lesson in the "futility" of people's movements. The choice is not accidental. Careful, and conscious, political analysis determined the selection of the time and the place. The period is sufficiently distant to avoid any direct allusion to contemporary events. The plight of the farm workers of Morelos is similar, in many respects, to the plight of colonial populations. We cannot miss the historical parallel, but the role of United States imperialism is not so obvious in the Mexican conflict as in more recent events in Asia and other parts of the world.

It is a gross distortion of history to ignore the fact that the peasant movement led by Zapata was part of a national uprising which was chiefly directed against the imperial power of the United States. But the film presents Mexico as a land of corrupt generals and politicians, apparently acknowledging no obligation to a foreign power. The demand for land on the part of the poverty-stricken Indians and Mestizos of Morelos is treated as a separate and isolated struggle, humanly justified, but doomed from the start because the peasants are too "ignorant" or "innocent" to seize and hold state power.

White chauvinism, contempt for the darker peoples of the world, is inherent in the conception. The directional treatment, the lighting, setting, costumes and movement of the actors, are all designed to reinforce the impression that the people of Morelos are "picturesque," artistically attractive, but totally incapable of effective organized action. Zapata's brother is shown as a drunken lout.

The characterization of Zapata deprives him of the intellectual stature he unquestionably possessed. The author of the Plan of Ayala, the program of land reform and national unity which is one of the great documents of the history of the Americas, is played by Marlon Brando as a man who is not only culturally, but politically, illiterate. The actor employs the same tricks and mannerisms

* Beals' letter and Kazan's reply to it appear in the *Saturday Review* of May 24, 1952.

** *Peace by Revolution*, New York, 1933.

that he used a few months earlier to depict the brutally inhuman "worker" in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Answering Beals' criticism, Kazan succeeds only in exposing his own chauvinistic contempt for the Mexican peasants and for Zapata as their representative. He quotes a letter from a lady, in which the lady asserts that the real reason for Zapata's retreat from the capital "was the typewriters."

"He conquered the city, vanquished rivals, contenders, occupied government offices, and there faced modern equipment for the manipulation of law and order. He did not know how to go on. The rows and rows of typewriters decided his retreat."

Kazan observes: "Still another version! And just human enough to have truth in it." Here we see the real face of the director, the man without honor or conscience who submits his life's work to the racist Congressman, John S. Wood of Georgia.

Kazan unwittingly reveals the real reason for his version of Zapata's "renunciation of power"—his peasant "stupidity," his inability to handle the "modern equipment for the manipulation of law and order." To be sure, Kazan does not blame Zapata for his fear of typewriters. He loves him for it. The "simple" peasant is a saint, if only he will bow to the "ancient law" that power corrupts—conveniently leaving power in the hands of those who exploit and starve the peasants.

Like all authoritarian concepts, this theory of power is mystical and irrational. The anti-intellectualism of the film is embodied in the symbolic figure of the man who "loves only logic," "the man with the typewriter," an incongruous individual who wanders through the story like a lost soul, having nothing to do with the action. He serves solely as an example of "a real revolutionist." He is close to Zapata in the peasant's rise to power, but turns against him after his "renunciation." If my eyes did not deceive me, he appears in later scenes in a sort of "commissar's" uniform. He displays his affection for logic by urging everyone who will listen to him to burn and destroy. We are fortunate in having the director's explanation of this character's function:

"There is such a thing as a Communist mentality. We created a figure of this complexion in Fernando, whom the audience identify as 'the man with the typewriter.' He typifies the men who use the just grievances of the people for their own ends, who shift and twist their course, betray any friends or principle or promise to get power and keep it."

It may be argued that Kazan is merely introducing a little "harmless" touch of anti-Communism, seeking to clear himself by muttering the penitential words which he also used in his appearance before the Un-Americans. But in the film, as in the proceedings of the committee, the idiocies of red-baiting provide the ideological excuse for the betrayal of democracy. Fernando is an utterly ridiculous figure in *Viva Zapata!*

The lack of invention or skill in the use of the character is appalling. Political necessity dictates the strange behavior of the character, and the same necessity makes it impossible to do without him or make sense out of him. Fernando is just as witless as the anti-Communism he personifies.

Fernando's function is directly related to Zapata's "renunciation." There must be a conflict—or at least the shadow of a conflict—between the hero's abandonment of power and another course of action. The alternative cannot be a real struggle for the land, because the film's social philosophy holds that the struggle is self-defeating and destructive. Yet it is not sufficient to counterpoise the aspirations of the peasants to the corruption of politics-as-usual: this would make a fool out of Zapata and expose the moral rotteness of his "renunciation." His choice must be between the existing corruption and something worse, which will eventuate if he continues to lead the people. Something worse is socialism or Communism, or any genuine change in class relationships and control of the state.

This, of course, is the purpose of all anti-Communist propaganda. Kazan would appear as an absolute fool in renouncing his liberal past, if he could not claim that he is avoiding *something worse* by yielding to the badgering of unscrupulous politicians. The stale clichés of red-baiting were used long before the Soviet Union was born, long before the great pioneering work of Marx and

Engels, to discredit any struggle for the rights of the oppressed and disinherited.

In *Viva Zapata!*, anti-Communism is offered as the excuse for re-writing the recent history of Mexico. Kazan boasts that the film's portrait of Zapata "spoiled a poster figure that the Communists have been at some pains to create." It is of no concern to Kazan that the "poster figure" he discards is known and loved by the people of the land.

He tells us, with the arrogance of the imperialist, that he and Steinbeck were warned in advance that the Mexican people would regard their film as a violation of Mexican history and traditions. The director and writer gave a preliminary script to "two men who are prominent in the Mexican film industry. . . . They came back with an attack that left us reeling. The script was impossible!" They pointed to many inaccuracies, "but, above all, they attacked with sarcastic fury our emphasis on his refusal to take power."

Kazan reports that Steinbeck reacted to the criticism by remarking: "I smell the Party line." Kazan adds: "I smelled it too." Here we have an admission that Kazan is lying when he says he never heard of the facts about Zapata's retreat from Mexico City. He learned the facts from responsible leaders of the Mexican film industry, as well as from books which he must have read. He ignored the facts because his employers and the Un-American Committee had ordered him to make an anti-democratic picture. He uses red-baiting, as it is always used, to cover the attack on truth and democracy.

Some of the more astute reviewers of the commercial press have noted that *Viva Zapata!* is a defense of the *status quo*. Otis L. Guernsey, Jr. writes in the New York *Herald Tribune* that the social problem is handled "as though Zapata's chief contribution to Mexican freedom had been a negative one." According to Guernsey, it is only after Zapata takes "to the hills in disgust at the corrupting influence of power" that he "comprehends the real issues with which his society is faced. . . .

"Peace and stability, Zapata finds, cannot be won by replacing a bad leader with a good one (even himself); it can be won only when each individual is able to take

his own responsibility, when there is no longer a need for any leader at all."^{*}

Admirers of the film have said that it ends affirmatively, stressing the people's love of Zapata and their feeling that even after his death the cause he fought for is unconquerable. But how can this hero symbolize an unconquerable cause when he himself denies struggle and forswears power? The *Herald Tribune* critic notes the real point of the conclusion: "The obvious goal—land reform—is as far off as it ever was." Furthermore, Guernsey sees that the characterization of Zapata is designed to reinforce the political lesson:

"The over-lapping values of bloody banditry and historical meaning are carried out in Brando's portrayal of the brooding Zapata. He is the slow fuse attached to the heavy powder-charge, a grim-looking, mustachioed fellow with dirt on his skin and simple conceptions of justice and violence in his mind. Like most Brando performances, Zapata is heavily underlined with animal traits. . . ."

It is significant that Zapata's final parting from his wife, when he rides into the trap that brings his death, is a scene of stupid physical violence. She clings to his horse, and he throws her off so roughly that she almost falls under the animal's feet. It is a fitting climax to a relationship totally lacking in dignity or depth of feeling. The scene has a vital place in the political scheme of the film. Zapata has not wholly renounced power. He is still seeking guns and allies to continue the fight. Therefore, it is necessary to show him in a violent mood, rejecting his wife's love, exhibiting the brutal side of his nature. His spectacular death fulfills the theme of renunciation. He must die because he is unable to hold to the "good life" which the makers of the film prescribe for the repentant leader.

Kazan describes the people of Morales as "the proudest and most

^{*} New York *Herald Tribune*, February 17, 1952.

independent in all Mexico. Their bearing is proof of the kind of man who led them out of bondage and did not betray them. I think it is also witness to the relationship of two things not usually coupled: politics and human dignity."

In a sense this is the most revealing passage in the director's *apologia*. Ignoring the present poverty of the Morales peasants, Kazan speaks glibly of their having been "led out of bondage." Zapata did not betray them, as he apparently would have done if he had led them to victory over their oppressors. As long as they accept hunger and renounce struggle, Kazan is pleased to grant them their dignity.

Kazan elucidates his meaning more fully in his testimony before the Un-American Committee. He performs an act of renunciation, subtly connected with the meretricious "renunciation" which he imposes on the celluloid Zapata. Kazan renounces political struggle, denies even the right to conduct struggle or hold opinions. Just as his false Zapata abandons land-reform in order to save the makers of the film from any suspicion of Communism, so Kazan discards all pretense of personal or artistic independence in order to retain whatever shreds of "dignity" the Committee will grant him.

Kazan's testimony has its moments of cruel comedy. The contradiction in the cultural informer's position—his pretense of speaking for freedom while he grovels before his inquisitors—is so intense that the witnesses seem slightly demented, as frantic to abandon sense and reason as if the wrack and the wheel awaited them in the ante-room. Kazan's affidavit dismisses the political activity of his adult years with these words: "My connections with these front organizations were so slight and so transitory that I am forced to rely on a listing of these prepared for me after research by my employer, Twentieth Century-Fox."

Kazan attains epic irony in explaining his reasons for quitting the Communist Party in 1936. Going back over nearly twenty years to crawl and apologize and admit errors to the Committee, Kazan explains his withdrawal from the party: "The last straw came when I was invited to go through a typical Communist scene of crawling and apologizing and admitting the error of my ways."

Statements of this sort are required by the Committee. One may assume that the Congressmen, the witnesses, and everybody present, know that the statement is false. If Kazan had gone through any such experience in 1936, his views and activities during the following years would have been affected by it. He would have spoken against Communism; he would have questioned the desirability of unified action of Communists, progressives and liberals. His artistic career would have followed a different course both in the Group Theatre and in his later career as a director.

Kazan's contempt for honor or truth in his testimony is one with the contempt for the truth of Mexican history in his film. An artist who has no respect for his own country's Bill of Rights will not hesitate to malign the democratic traditions of the Mexican people.

In terms of historical theory, there is a link between *Viva Zapata!* and *The Red Badge of Courage*. Both pictures preach the futility of any struggle for freedom. *Viva Zapata!* turns to Mexican history to make the lesson more explicit. In a suggestive passage, in his letter defending the film, Kazan hints that his method of treating Zapata may also be applied to great figures in United States history:

"We know that the Communists in Mexico try to capitalize on the people's reverence for Zapata by working his figure into their propaganda—much as Communists here quote Lincoln to their purpose."

We can await the Kazan-Steinbeck attempt to rescue Lincoln from the "poster figure" the Communists have helped to create. The theory that "power corrupts" can be applied in Lincoln's case. It can be suggested that the Great Emancipator made a fatal error in signing the Emancipation Proclamation. It can be shown that he would have been wiser to acknowledge the "ancient law" that renunciation is better than victory. This revision of history will be especially fascinating to Kazan and Steinbeck, not to mention Zanuck, when they discover that the influence of Communists was a factor in persuading Lincoln to proclaim Emancipation, as in many other vital matters affecting the conduct of the war.

No doubt Kazan will play his small, inglorious part in further Hollywood efforts to cut down the great democratic leaders of history to fit Wall Street's specifications.

Kazan will be loyal to the Un-American Committee and to his employers, happy in the knowledge that there is no essential conflict between them. The last sentence of his statements to the committee shows he is untroubled by any problem of divided loyalties: "I have placed a copy of this affidavit with Mr. Spyros P. Skouras, president of Twentieth Century-Fox."

4. mass-man

WE HAVE SEEN THAT *Viva Zapata!*, while pretending to show sympathy for the peasants, actually warns of the danger that people will get out of hand and be led into lawless violence. The social viewpoint is related to the theory, on which gangster and war pictures are based, that man is by nature depraved and aggressive. But the idea is developed from a different angle in *Viva Zapata!* While the gangster films depict violence as a way of life and the war films make it a military virtue, *Viva Zapata!* deplores violence.

The reason, of course, lies in the subject-matter of the Mexican film: it deals with revolution. Hollywood can treat crime sympathetically and depict war as the noblest expression of manhood. But revolutions threaten the class which the motion picture industry serves. In Hollywood's perverted lexicon of social values, the lower classes represent brute force, incapable of reasonable decision, driven by ignoble impulses.

Hollywood's conception of the "mass-man" is not a studio invention. It has its origin in a whole network of historical, philosophical and sociological theories which seek to justify the power of the bourgeoisie on the ground that the masses are "dangerous" and must be ruled with an iron hand. These theories are most unequivocally expressed in the ideology of fascism, but scholars in Europe and the United States have vied with the propagandists of

Hitler's Third Reich in solemn diatribes against the excesses of "mass-man."^{*}

The statement of the "mass-man" theory which has been most influential in the cultural field, and especially in the Hollywood film, is the "psychological" formulation developed in the later works of Sigmund Freud. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud relies heavily on Gustav LeBon's *Psychologie des Foules*. He quotes and approves LeBon's description of the individual in a group as a person who has lost restraint and self-control: "The conscious personality has entirely vanished; will and discernment are lost. . . . By the mere fact that he forms part of an organized group, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian—that is, a creature acting by instinct."^{**}

Since the crowd has no will, its actions are determined by the leader who is able to hypnotize it. According to Freud, the group is bound to the leader by "libido," the energy generated by "love," which is basically sexual but includes all human and social relationships: "Love relationships constitute the essence of the group mind. A group is clearly held together by a power of some kind: and to what power could this feat be better ascribed than to Eros, who holds together everything in the world?"^{***}

We may pause to note the extraordinary *a priori* method of reasoning employed by Freud. Since love "holds together everything in the world," we can hardly quarrel with the assumption that it unites the group. "Libido" is instinctive, irrational, thrives on illusion: "Groups demand illusions and cannot do without them. They constantly give what is unreal precedence over what is real."^{****}

The "libidinal ties" formed among members of the group explain what Freud regards as its characteristic features—"the weakness of intellectual ability, the lack of emotional restraint, the incapacity for moderation and delay, the inclination to exceed every limit in

^{*} Lothrop Stoddard, a professor at Harvard, published *The Revolt Against Civilization: the Menace of the Underman*, in 1925, the year in which Hitler published *Mein Kampf*. The similarity between the two works is striking.

^{**} *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, New York, n.d., pp. 12-14.

^{***} *Ibid.*, p. 40.

^{****} *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

the expression of emotion and to work it off completely in the form of action." The members of the group want to "be loved in the same way by one person, the leader . . . they all want to be ruled by one person." Freud concludes that man is a "horde animal, an individual creature in a horde led by a chief."^{*}

Freud published these views in Vienna in 1921. The book reflects the fears aroused in the European bourgeoisie by the success of the Russian Revolution. While Freud insists on the superior mental power of the "isolated individual," his own thinking cannot be isolated from the attitude of his class toward the world-shaking events that followed the First World War—the emergence of the Soviet Union and the democratic ferment throughout the world. Freud was also troubled by the beginnings of fascism in Italy, and he was later shocked by the Nazi terror in Germany. Like the "cultivated individual" of whom he wrote, he sought to stand aloof from the "organized mass." But he could find no consolation in his bitter meditations on the depravity of Man.

As the Nazis moved toward the conquest of power, Freud moved toward a philosophy of deeper negation and despair. In *Civilization and its Discontents*, he wrote that "the tendency to aggression is an innate, independent, instinctual disposition of man."^{**} He traced the aggressive instinct back through the ages to primitive society, finding the origin of man's hatred of his fellow man in the primitive family, arising out of the sons' incestuous inclinations toward the mother, which led them to rebel against the father's authority and even to kill the father.^{***} According to Freud, Man is powerless to reject the cruel heritage. It is the burden of all his guilt-ridden days. Progress toward civilization is "the result of that repression of instinct upon which what is most valuable in human nature is built."^{****}

The Freudian argument forms the central theme of hundreds of contemporary plays, novels, stories and poems, and it is not less

^{*} *Ibid.*, pp. 81-89.

^{**} New York (1939), p. 102.

^{***} The theory is most fully developed in *Totem and Taboo*, London, n.d.

^{****} *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, New York, n.d., p. 52.

influential in the other arts. The writer or artist is *subjectively* attracted to Freud^{*} because the theory offers a supposedly "scientific" excuse for isolation from social action and pre-occupation with "guilt feelings" and moods of despair. But objectively, Freud merely reflects, in pseudo-scientific phraseology, the propaganda of imperialism, which holds that "repression of instinct" must be imposed on "primitive" peoples, who "retrogress" and abandon the "restraints of civilization" when they form "organized groups" to rebel against imperialism. Since the theory expresses the class viewpoint of the bourgeoisie, it applies to the lower classes, who become "hypnotized," subject to "instinctual drives" when they fight against oppression.

Hollywood's fear of "mass-man" is most brutally and chauvinistically exhibited in films dealing with people of Africa and Asia, and in portrayal of the Indian and Negro people of the United States. The wanton killing of women and children in *One Minute to Zero* is offered to audiences already trained to accept the massacre of Indians or colonial "natives" as a casual prerogative of the white conquerors. Negro crowds are represented as peculiarly "primitive," easily hypnotized.

A catalogue of these insults to the Negro people could fill a volume. When there is talk of "progress" in Hollywood's social views, we may compare the horrifying treatment of American Negroes in *Hallelujah* in 1929 with the equally horrifying treatment of Hindu and African crowds in *Bwana Devil* in 1953. There is little to choose between the two pictures. But it is of some interest to turn back to King Vidor's *Hallelujah*: it was hailed at the time by some misguided critics as an "artistic" portrayal of Negro life; its hysterically emotional and violently "primitive" group scenes were accepted as a sign of Hollywood's "maturity" in dealing with a "difficult" theme.

Like *Hallelujah*, the cycle of "Negro interest" films in 1949 drew its basic social philosophy from Freudian sources. These pictures

^{*} We are here concerned solely with the cultural influence of the social theories developed by Freud in his later writings. It must be noted that many psychoanalysts in the United States discard all or part of the Freudian doctrine. It is not our purpose to discuss clinical aspects of psychoanalysis, or to explore the wide variations in its practice.

blame the oppression of the Negro people on their own "guilt feelings" and the "instinctual aggressiveness" of both Negroes and lower class whites.

A variation on the same theme may be found in *Lydia Bailey*, which deals with the Haitian revolution of 1802. At the opening of the picture, the sound of ominous drums accompanies the comment flashed on the screen, describing Haiti as "A nation keyed to hysteria by the constant beat of jungle drums." Later scenes show the rebellion inaugurated by Voodoo rites, and a chauvinistic caricature of the beautiful dances of the Haitian people. We see houses in flames, as Negro "mobs" surge across the screen. There is even the customary scene in which the white heroine is threatened by a Negro.

These actions are attributed to the "bad" Negro leader, who opposes Toussaint L'Ouverture's policy of moderation. Toussaint appears as a kindly, ineffectual man, whose insistence that he is a "man of peace" parallels the renunciation motif in *Viva Zapata!* Toussaint's avoidance of struggle is counterposed to scenes in which Negro faces appear in closeup shouting "Kill all the whites! Kill! Kill!"

At the end of the picture, the hero and the beautiful heroine, Lydia Bailey, return to the United States. They have learned to sympathize with the Negro people and have supposedly rendered some service to the revolution in the course of their puerile adventures. As they row out to a vessel in the harbor, the whole city behind them is enveloped in flames.

One can imagine that the authors, Michael Blankfort and Philip Dunne, completed the script with the same feeling as that of the film's stars abandoning the flaming island. They have done exactly what was expected of them. They have found their way through impossible situations and fatuous dialogue, to the politically safe conclusion: colonial oppression, we are told, should be alleviated, but we must protect these "savages" from leaders who play upon their "primitive" instincts.

The Freudian "mass man" plays a leading role in a number of Hollywood films dealing with strikes, riots or lynchings in "typical" white communities. A classic example of the genre is Fritz Lang's *Fury*. When the picture appeared in 1936, critics welcomed it as a

courageous social statement, because, forsooth, it comes out forthrightly in opposition to lynching of an innocent white man—and blames it on the imbecility of the people!*

The impact of a film like *Fury* must be assessed in terms of the specific issues which stirred the public at the time of its appearance. It was released at a moment of crisis in the development of the progressive coalition supporting Franklin D. Roosevelt. The President was running for reelection against a powerful Republican drive to smash the New Deal. The sit-down strike of rubber workers in Akron, Ohio, inaugurated a wave of strikes which swept the mass production industries, bringing union organization to the automobile factories and steel mills.

Hollywood made a contribution to the campaign against Roosevelt and against the labor movement by showing a mob setting fire to a jail in order to kill an innocent man. *Fury* taught a lesson in the perils of collective action, which tied in with newspaper propaganda against the trade unions. Since the labor movement and its allies were strong at the time, *Fury* shows group insanity divorced from social issues, and ends with the hero forgiving the leaders of the mob and pleading for tolerance.

The formula used in *Fury* is repeated in a recent film, *The Well*. But while *Fury* deals with white men in an apparently lily-white town, *The Well* acknowledges the growing militancy of the Negro people by introducing the Negro community as an important part of the action. But this is done in order to deliver a message which is extremely serviceable to reaction—"race riots," says the film, are caused by the violence of human nature, Negro and white, but a major share of the blame is assessed against the Negroes.

This distortion of contemporary reality is accomplished by a highly contrived plot structure, based upon a well-nigh impossible social situation. The innocent man threatened with lynching is white. But the hysteria arises from the rumor that he has attacked a Negro child. We know at the start of the story that the charge is

* I must regretfully note that my treatment of *Fury* in *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting* ignores the film's political significance. (See pp. 403-405; 420-421; 430.)

false, for we see the girl wander across a field and stumble into a well.

The town's sheriff, who is the most sympathetically portrayed character in the film, assigns his whole force to find the child. But the Negro delegation which visits the sheriff is not satisfied that he is really searching for the attacker. One of the Negroes is so "prejudiced" as to say: "Maybe you haven't found him because he's a white man." The sheriff is properly indignant. But gossip and bitterness spread through the Negro community, which is responsible for the first outbreak of violence.

The rioting instigated by the Negroes is answered by white hoodlums. The picture is as savage as gangster films in its emphasis on physical brutality. It pretends to maintain "impartiality" by showing both sides "obsessed" with the desire to kill and burn. However, there is a difference in the composition of the two "mobs": the whites are ruffians operating under the orders of a wealthy man whose nephew is the person accused of attacking the Negro child. On the other hand, the Negroes are representative of their community.

Detailed examination of this arrangement shows what is concealed under the cloak of "impartiality." There is a hint of actual class relationships in the portrait of the industrialist, who whips up the anti-Negro prejudice. But his reasons are largely personal: his first attempts to protect his nephew lead to his being beaten by a group of Negroes. The Negroes are the first aggressors, and the audience knows that the accusation against the nephew is false. Thus the just anger of the Negro people in resisting their tormentors is attributed to a "misunderstanding," and their struggle for their rights is equated with the brutality of their oppressors. The makers of *The Well* have a "sense of justice" that reminds us of Pontius Pilate: seeing that "a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person. . . ." The film-makers observe today's tumult and wash their hands, publicly, of all responsibility for the blood of the Negro people.

"Impartiality" is represented in the film by the white Mayor and

* St. Matthew, 27:24.

the white sheriff. The sheriff is the hero, symbol of law and order, interested only in the general welfare, which is threatened by the masses, Negro and white. In a scene which is like a burlesque commentary on the film's social viewpoint, the sheriff reprimands one of his men for being "rough" with a Negro prisoner!

The climax of *The Well* deals with the rescue of the child. The news that the little girl is alive at the bottom of the abandoned shaft causes the crowd to stop the conflict and hurry to watch the rescue, which is organized by the fascist businessman who had previously encouraged the warfare against the Negroes. The nephew—the man who had been accused of the crime—makes the dangerous descent to bring the Negro child to safety.

While Negro workers participate in the rescue, the greatest courage and generosity is displayed by the whites, especially the fascist businessman. The climax points up the "emotional instability" of the crowd. Their "instinctive aggressiveness" is cured by the transfer of their "libido" to a new object when they hear the child is in danger. The sentimental solution screens, and at the same time strengthens, the reactionary theme. The submissive crowd gathered in the glare of the headlights has no mind of its own. It is at the mercy of anyone clever enough to stir its volatile feelings.

The "organized group" united by sentiment at the end of *The Well* marks the present stage of development in Hollywood's study of the Freudian "mass man." The next step is suggested in the brutality of the Korean war pictures and in the increasingly open call for violence against "radicals" and "dangerous foreigners" in anti-Communist pictures. When the motion picture industry feels that the public has been sufficiently indoctrinated with the idea that human beings are "horde animals," a "strong man" will appear on the screen, hypnotizing the crowd and directing its "aggressive instincts" against anyone who defends democracy and peace.

A number of psychoanalysts in the United States are exploring the political implications of the Freudian doctrine with zeal, and in some cases with revelatory frankness. In a recent issue of a journal of psychoanalysis, John C. Gustin describes two young men whom he had under treatment. In both cases, the "clinical picture presented the classical symptoms of Obsessional Neurosis." Both

men were at Peekskill, taking opposite sides in the struggle around the Robeson concert in 1949.

Both, writes Gustin, were motivated by the same "compulsive drives":

"Each, bolstered by his own particular kind of righteous rationalization, had realized in the Peekskill incident, an acceptable opportunity to release his pent-up sadistic strivings and unconscious desire to commit violence. . . . Thus, even though their ideologies seemed to be opposed, the 'reasons' were, in fact, reducible to a common denominator, a 'permissive factor' which enabled them to find release for the repressed murderous impulses."

Ignoring the known fact that a peaceful concert was attacked and that no one attending the concert manifested any impulse beyond the desire to hear a great singer, the psychoanalyst insists upon the existence of "repressed murderous impulses" on both sides. "In my opinion," he writes,

"the fact that our two patients fought on opposing sides at Peekskill was just an accidental detail. Either could equally well have found himself on the other side. . . . The point is that these two patients had not been brought there by objective judgment, free will and decision (as each, of course, thought) but by powerful subjective impulses. . . . The issue of 'Democracy' was not the deciding factor; it was the excuse."⁶

The psychoanalyst spells out the appropriate moral: "If any lesson can be learned from psychology, it is that strife and dissension prevalent in this country cannot be blamed solely on malevolent, selfish capitalists nor power-driven politicians." The blame, according to the writer, rests on the "obsessional character structure of the Mass American." Gustin's "objectivity" is as dishonest as the "impartiality" of the makers of *The Well*. Since both sides were looking for an excuse to vent their "sadistic strivings," and since the concert provided the excuse, the psychoanalyst supports the view that the

organizers of the concert were responsible for providing the occasion for the outbreak.

A similar concept underlies the description of the Detroit "race riots" of 1943 in *I Was a Communist for the FBI*. Although there is not the slightest doubt that the unprovoked attack on Negro citizens of Detroit was organized by powerful fascist elements, the film assumes that the Negroes and whites were equally guilty of repressed "murderous impulses," manipulated by Communists to produce the disturbance.

Hollywood has not as yet made extensive use of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of history. There is an article on Lincoln in the same issue of the periodical, *Psychoanalysis*, which offers some hints to enterprising film-makers. A. Bronson Feldman examines the Civil War as a Southern rebellion against the father-image, symbolized by Lincoln. According to Feldman, the slavholders regarded Lincoln as a symbol of tyranny—

"the same tyranny in essence which the ego learns to fear in the father, whose sexual intercourse with the mother is thought of by children as an onslaught of sadism. . . . From the viewpoint of Freudian mythology, the Southerners represented an alliance of brothers in revolt against the father. By their rebellion, they accomplished what all the sons of Columbia wished in their hearts. . . ."

The psychoanalyst is not content to represent Lincoln as the father-enemy of the Southerners. He insists that the Confederate rebellion expressed the subconscious wish of the whole people. The murder of Lincoln satisfied "the savage death-wishes" of the North as well as the South:

"Men of fidelity to the Union, or the Republican Party, had to repress the id-pleasure over the kill: they translated the slaughter, in Shakespeare's phrase, into a 'dish for the Gods,' a divine sacrifice. . . ."

"It was inevitable that he should not only be considered worthy of death as the redeemer of the people's guilt, the representative of the incest-haunted and father-hating brothers who had ravaged Columbia and

⁶ "The Great American Neurosis," *Psychoanalysis*, Vol. I, No. 1.

drenched her with blood. . . . On February 12—Lincoln's anniversary—the nation rehearses the tragi-comedy of his deification, the vicarious killing, the unconscious rejoicing over his death, the introjection of his image by a process that may properly be defined as intellectual cannibalism.”*

Here are the raw materials for dozens of historical films. The American Revolution can also be treated as a neurotic revolt against the father-image. Franklin D. Roosevelt may be shown as a leader who was subconsciously hated by the people who thought they loved him.

Hollywood has much to learn from the Freudians. Judging from past experience, the film-makers will be apt pupils.

5. the degradation of women

THERE ARE BASIC political and economic reasons for the degraded position of women in our society. Cultural attitudes toward women reflect the *mores* of capitalism. These *mores* are not shaped by sentiment, literary artifice, or the arrogance of the “male animal.” The frustrations of the middle class woman do not originate within the walls of her home; the petty preoccupations which paralyze her personal development are her small part of the toll exacted from her working class sisters.

The root of the woman question must be sought in the system of production, which holds women in reserve as a potential threat to the wages of men, or employs them at a lower rate in order to reduce the whole level of wages. The five billion dollars of profit which industry obtains each year from the wage-differential between men and women tells us more of the rights, and wrongs, of women than any investigation of sex relationships or family customs.

Needless to say, Hollywood is not interested in the wage dif-

* “Lincoln: The Psychology of a Cult,” *Psychoanalysis*, Vol. I, No. 1.

ferential or in the problems of working women. Hollywood treats “glamor” and sex appeal as the sum-total of woman's personality. Arthur Freed, producer of many M-G-M musicals, is reported to have said of Esther Williams: “She's not only good-looking, she's cheerful. You can sell cheerfulness.”*

Many people assume that Hollywood, at least in its lighter moments, when not engaged in playing with machine guns and sadistic tortures, is chiefly interested in selling cheerfulness. But even the most innocuous musical, zany comedy or sentimental drama plays its part in the propaganda pattern. The social and political significance of the pattern lies, to a considerable extent, in the portrayal of women.

The theory that human nature is essentially aggressive and brutal has a special bearing on the role of women. It is assumed that women are less “reasonable” than men, more “instinctual,” less able to suppress “primitive” impulses. These traits attributed to women are related to the qualities which the propaganda of imperialism assigns to colonial peoples, and to the lower classes generally: women, like “savages” and the untutored masses, are supposed to be dangerously emotional and violent when their passions are aroused; they also possess “charm,” which is best when it is expressed naively, with submissive obedience and childlike spontaneity.

Freud tells us that women are more preoccupied with sex than men, and he concludes that for this reason they are less civilized, less able to practice the “repression of instinct” which civilized life requires:

“Women represent the interests of the family and sexual life; the work of civilization has become more and more men's business; it confronts them with ever harder tasks, compels them to sublimation of instincts which women are not easily able to achieve. . . . Woman thus finds herself forced into the background by the claims of culture and adopts an inimical attitude toward it.”**

We can hardly say that woman is forced into the background

* Lillian Ross, *The New Yorker*, June 14, 1953.

** *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 73.

of motion pictures. She is placed in the foreground, precisely for the reasons Freud outlines. She is lovely and amusing when she is content to play the role of a precocious child. But she bears the chief guilt of man's "primitive" weaknesses. She is the symbol of the compulsions to sex, sadism and brutality which are the burden of the whole society. At the same time, since these compulsions are deeply rooted in the hearts of men, the woman is sought after and admired. She is *libido*, cause of strife, object of desire.

But intellectually and morally, she is inferior. She is "inimical" to the claims of "culture" which seeks to stabilize society by the regimentation of "mass-man," the orderly exploitation of labor and the super-exploitation of colonies. Freud does not suggest that women are inimical to these aims because they have any ethical objections or any higher purposes. On the contrary, women are simply incapable of understanding "the work of civilization."

Portraits of women in Hollywood films fall into three general categories: the woman as a criminal or the instigator of crimes; the woman as man's enemy, fighting and losing—for she must always lose—in the battle of the sexes; the woman as a "primitive" child, fulfilling the male dream of a totally submissive vehicle of physical pleasure.

The categories are not mutually exclusive. The woman with an uncontrollable impulse to commit criminal acts may have the appearance of an angel, as in *Leave Her to Heaven*. Gangster pictures show women as active participants in crime or as victims of the lawbreakers, but there is no clear line between the two things. In either case, there is a sex conflict, leading to sadistic violence. In *The Lady Gambles*, Barbara Stanwyck sticks an electric cigarette lighter in the eye of the gangster who is driving an automobile, sending the car and its occupants over an embankment to flaming death.

There is an increasing emphasis on sadism. A recent picture, *Without Warning*, is described in posters in these words: "Kill! Kill! Kill! He can't help it. When they kiss him, he loses control and has to kill." The advertisement indicates that, even where the woman is the frightened victim, she is the temptress, the object of the desire the sadist cannot control.

In attributing crime to unavoidable sexual impulses, these pictures

tend to justify criminal conduct—and even to make it attractive. Persons who cherish illusions about the cultural superstructure may not wish to believe that Hollywood and its Wall Street masters are intentionally promoting crime or seeking to cripple the moral sense of young people. Those of us who have participated in studio story conferences can testify that the appeal of pornography and blood is calculated as coldly as if it were money—which indeed it is.

Pornography was one of the weapons of Hitler propaganda in Germany. Gangsterism was an essential support of the regime, which encouraged moral turpitude and appealed to the "manliness" of sadists, perverts, thieves and drug addicts. These are men whose way of life is based on contempt for women. The blood ties supposedly uniting the élite and their henchmen are male ties. The criminal elements utilized by fascism make a fetish of male superiority.

Sexual promiscuity and homosexuality have their place in the "obsessional character structure" of the men who assemble in brown or black shirts, or in the white sheets of the Klan. The Nazis made a hero of the pimp, Horst Wessel. The armies marching against the Soviet Union sang of "Den Marsch, von Horst Wessel begonnen." The song had its social logic: the hero of woman's degradation inaugurated the eastward march which was intended to restore the blessings of prostitution to the Soviet Union.

Many film artists seem to be unaware of the political purpose underlying the increasingly degrading roles assigned to women. Olivia de Havilland remarks in an interview that she is pleased with her part in *Rachel*: "You'll never know whether Rachel poisoned her husband or whether she attempted to poison the boy, Philip Ashley. . . . Rachel is judged entirely within the framework of suspicion, so everything she does becomes ambiguous."* The actress who has recently played Juliet and Candida on the stage is reduced to the "interesting ambiguity" of a part which degrades her art and insults her sex.

The social viewpoint which regards women as especially burdened with the depravity of human nature justifies the male in tak-

* *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1952.

ing any measures to force women into submission. The relationship between the subjugation of women and authoritarian politics is suggested in *Westward the Women*. The picture is presented as a tribute to the heroism of a group of women, making a trans-continental journey in the days of covered wagons and multiple perils. But the historical framework is utilized to preach a cold war sermon on the depravity of people and the need of iron discipline. The political message is as unmistakable as in the Korean war films. Women in this case are the recipients of the message. They must be taught to obey unhesitatingly when the master of the expedition, Robert Taylor, tells them to work or fight.

Taylor's main problem at the start of the journey is sex: the women must be delivered unsullied to the husbands who await them in California. Taylor solves the problem by decreeing the death penalty for flirtation. When he imposes the penalty on one of the men, the others desert, leaving Taylor alone with the band of women. The dominant male now has the double trouble of forcing them to do the men's work and restraining his own amorous impulses. There is a class viewpoint implicit in the theme. Only women of the lower class, forced by poverty to seek husbands they have never seen, would be subjected to the indignities imposed on these travelers. Taylor's method, as he describes it, is to "drive 'em so they can't think." He orders them to "get that dumb cow look off your faces."

The class angle in *Westward the Women* is defined in the hero's attitude toward the heroine. Denise Daele plays a young French woman with a questionable past. Anyone familiar with Hollywood methods of preparing a script can be sure that the makers of the film discussed this characterization as a means of justifying Taylor's conduct. It is obvious (to Hollywood experts on the woman question) that a man may indulge in any jibes or insults in dealing with a woman who is a foreigner of somewhat tarnished reputation. When Miss Daele rebels and runs away, Taylor pursues her, horsewhips her, strikes her so violently in the face that he draws blood. Then they melt into one another's arms.

When a woman succeeds in the world of competition, Hollywood holds that her success is achieved by trickery, deceit, and the amoral use of sex appeal. Three years ago, a film purported to tell us

All About Eve. The Eve of the picture is a conscienceless liar. She is willing to violate every canon of decency in order to become a famous actress. It turns out that Eve's real name, which she has concealed, is foreign, Polish or Jewish. Thus the picture associates her conduct with an attack on the foreign born and a touch of anti-Semitism. (The film also contains an offensive caricature of a Jewish theatrical producer.)

All About Eve is one of Hollywood's clearest statements on the role of women. Eve is brutal and aggressive, because this is human nature, but it is especially the nature of women. The point is hammered home at the end of the film: another young woman appears to begin her career exactly as Eve had begun it, grimly demure, determined to duplicate the changeless pattern of cheating and lying.

All About Eve bears a relationship to the real experience of women in the frantic competition of show business. Hollywood lives by the abysmal standards of conduct popularized in its films. The industry forces these standards on the artists whom it employs. As a result, there is a deep conflict between the artist's desire to work honestly and creatively, and the rewards offered by Hollywood to the dishonest and unscrupulous. The conflict is tragic for women, because they are regarded as pawns in the game of sex and money. The personal and professional lives of many actresses are as empty as the roles they portray on the screen.

The motion picture heroines who are presented in a favorable light are women who accept their function as objects of male desire. They are as devoid of personality or will as the stereotyped faces of stars who are supposed to embody the ideal of feminine loveliness. The film heroine reminds us of Marina in Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Finding herself in a brothel, Marina exclaims: "The Gods defend me!" The Bawd replies: "If it please the Gods to defend you by men, then men must comfort you, men must feed you, men must stir you up."

Hollywood's "glamor" women are suppliants and victims in a man's world. Jane Russell, whose fame was achieved by unusually vulgar publicity, moves through the contrived plot of *Las Vegas Story* as if she were sleep-walking. She is as helpless as Marina in the brothel—although Las Vegas is larger, and certainly better

lighted, than the house of sin in Shakespeare's play. In a more comic vein, but with the same concept of woman as a beautiful "commodity," Hedy Lamarr retains her mask-like passivity among the frantic devices of a Bob Hope farce in *My Favorite Spy*.

In analyzing the content of films, it is useful to pay special attention to comparatively minor incidents, introduced to elicit laughter or decorate the action. Such incidental scenes are often used to underline a social concept, expressing it more crudely than would be possible in the treatment of the leading characters. This is especially true of scenes or lines which emphasize contempt for women. For example, *Moulin Rouge* opens with a sequence showing the famous Parisian cabaret in the 1890's. The director, John Huston, selects as a "typical" event, a fight between two women performers, one of whom is a Negro woman. The audience is supposed to laugh at the two frantic creatures, kicking and scratching, rolling on the floor, tearing each other's hair. Although the Negro woman is somewhat less "aggressive" than the other, she is portrayed as "primitively" hot-tempered and violent.

The scene has an important bearing on the later development of the picture. It sets the mood which Huston wishes to establish for the story of Toulouse-Lautrec: the night life which surrounds the painter is brutal in a picturesque sort of way; but it is not to be taken seriously, and there is nothing tragic or profoundly human about the women of the Parisian underworld. This is especially important in the treatment of the aristocratic artist's passion for a woman of the streets: the story must be told from *his point of view*, emphasizing the depth of his frustration and depriving the prostitute of any sympathy.

The technical means which Huston employs in introducing the prostitute serve to achieve the desired effect: camera angles make her pathetic in a childish, helpless way. When Toulouse-Lautrec brings her to his studio, she asks for a bath. There is a "laugh line": "I never had a bath before." It may, of course, be true that the woman had never taken a bath in a tin tub, but the suggestion that a prostitute is unwashed is false. The insulting laugh at the woman's expense is combined with the usual glimpse of flesh as she undresses.

Lydia Bailey, which we have discussed in another connection,

provides an example of the interconnection between political propaganda and the portrayal of women. The Negro leader in the picture, who is called "King Dick" and who symbolizes the aspirations of the Haitian people, is introduced as a wealthy man with a large villa and eight wives. One by one, the eight giggling, submissive Negro women are called by their husband, to be presented to his guest with "comic" observations (the husband cannot remember the name of the most recent addition to the household.)

As in *Moulin Rouge*, the apparently haphazard attempt to get laughs at the expense of woman's personality is actually designed to set the tone for the main action of the film. The scene with the wives in *Lydia Bailey* conditions our attitude toward "King Dick" and the Haitian struggle for independence.

Since "King Dick" is rich, the class basis for the struggle is eliminated. "King Dick" is presented as a sympathetic figure: the part is played by William Marshall, an actor with unusual qualities of strength, dignity and charm. But the film defines his personality by Hollywood standards: he is well-to-do and he is able to handle eight women.

The scene with the wives prepares the way for an exotic revolution, which cannot be taken seriously. In a more profound sense, the scene derides the whole concept of human rights for which the Haitian people are striving.

Hollywood's heroes seldom have eight wives. A situation of this sort can occur only in dealing with "inferior" peoples and as a special insult to Negro womanhood. But the woman in the average film is as "inferior" as the giggling wives. She can pretend to resist the male, but the plot will expose the pretense and force her submission. An advance trailer for *The Lady Says No* gives a capable description of a familiar plot: "She finds out how much she's missing and makes up for lost time."

In *Too Young To Kiss*, June Allyson plays the part of a pianist who is refused an audition by a young impresario. She decided to masquerade as a child in order to persuade the man to give her a concert as a child prodigy. The humor lies in the impresario's growing love for a child who is apparently "too young to kiss." One need not comment on the vulgarity of the idea, or the embarrassing plight of the actress who cannot achieve the slightest resemblance

to the appearance or behavior of a twelve-year-old.

Too Young to Kiss is a Freudian comedy. The man's sense of guilt is playfully developed in several suggestive scenes. But there is a more important symbolism in the woman's masquerade as a child. It is only in this way, by abandoning her adult personality, that she can secure the man's love. An attraction based on such a misunderstanding is obviously purely physical, untrammelled by the need of intellectual companionship. But the deception also bears on the woman's ambition for a career. She can overcome the man's antagonism and display her ability if she pays the price—the denial of womanhood, the pretended status of a child.

It may be argued that there are certain Hollywood films which reject this degrading concept of love relationships. Yet almost the only pictures which give woman a sort of dignity are those which deal with renunciation themes. A lachrymose example of the genre is *The Blue Veil*, in which Jane Wyman devotes her life to unselfish care of other people's children. Instead of being beaten into submission, the woman submits voluntarily. She "sublimates" her aggressive instincts by negation of her desire for personal happiness.

The Academy Award for the best picture of 1951 went to *An American in Paris*, one of Hollywood's most ambitious ventures into the realm of "pure entertainment," offered with taste and imagination, and the effective use of Gershwin's music. We must look beneath the surface charm of *An American in Paris* to discover its social tendency and relationship to current politics.

Paris is a focal point of European diplomatic intrigue. It is also "the city of light," traditional center of European and world culture. The city which provides the setting for *An American in Paris* was built on a back-lot. Its quaint streets and cool fountains are a nineteenth century paradise of penniless artists, subservient shopkeepers, and uninhibited song. Although the heroine and the Frenchman to whom she is engaged are supposed to have gone through the Resistance, there is no indication that they or their environment have been affected by the Nazi occupation. All the people in the story are harmless children. Even their love affairs are guileless.

However, their innocence has its own *rationale*. Hollywood, having ruined the French motion picture industry by forcing French

theatres to play its imported films, now offers a prize film in which the French heroine, having lived through the Resistance with her lover, finds that she is irresistibly attracted to a young painter from the United States. One wonders whether a patriotic French woman would be likely to feel such a preference in these days when the United States treats France like an occupied country.

In developing its theme, the film distorts the whole meaning of Gershwin's composition. Gershwin wrote a musical satire on foreign visitors in Paris. The film ignores the composer's irony, and shows the men from the United States as friendly, casual conquerors.

The basis for the heroine's choice is the treatment of love as a miraculous impulse. The woman, being the servant of love, has no control over her feelings. Although she realizes early in the film that she is drawn to the painter, she cannot tell the truth either to him or to her fiancé. She is pictured as a charming child. But she is nonetheless able to deceive both men. Since *An American in Paris* assumes that love is an escape from reality, the picture reaches a climax in a total escape from the real world. The brilliantly devised ballet calls upon the resources of nineteenth century French painting to create a dream world of marching Hussars and grotesque women and gracious dancers.

The escape into the past through the dream-ballet defines the film's theme. The picturesque Paris of the early scenes is part of the never-never land which is realized more fully in the dance sequence. Nostalgia has its logic. *An American in Paris* tells us that we might be happy and contented, if only we could find a way to live the carefree life of Paris in the last century. It is a cosmopolitan life of rootless people, with leisure and no sense of responsibility. These people pretend they have escaped, but they conform to all the requirements of the dominant culture of imperialism. Women are childlike and charming. The lower classes are obedient. The men from the United States are superior in charm and sexual attractiveness. The picture assures us we can escape from the horrors of contemporary society—if we accept its values and dream according to an approved formula.

When Hollywood attempts to deal "realistically" with contemporary life we are introduced to a Freudian nightmare. The con-

cept of human relationships implicit in the gangster and sex picture is stated explicitly in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The film adaptation differs from the play in making the chief character insane from the beginning of the story. In the stage presentation, Blanche is a neurotic woman, whom we see suffer and break under the impact of events.

In the film, the opening scenes show Blanche arriving at the New Orleans railroad station, lost in a hurrying crowd, hearing voices and noises that become frighteningly unreal. Vivien Leigh plays the part as a hopelessly bewildered and irrational woman, and the impression is heightened by her deranged conduct when she reaches her sister's home.

The concept of "primitive compulsive drives," which is the basic social viewpoint of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, is linked to the background music coming from neighboring Negro "dives," which highlights the more intense movements of the action. This Freudian musical accompaniment has strong overtones of white chauvinism, inferring that the Negro people are especially representative of these "instincts" which engulf Blanche.

Elia Kazan directs the actors with an emphasis on physical and psychological violence that comes close to burlesque. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a box office success, but audiences seem more amused than stirred by its histrionic excesses. I saw the picture at an evening performance in a neighborhood theater, where the admission price was fifty cents. The spectators were audibly derisive of Marlon Brando's hysterical performance as the "primitively brutal" Stanley Kowalski. When Brando threw the radio out the window in a drunken brawl, there was scattered laughter. When the actor followed this with a noisy fit of sobbing, the laughter became a gale which swept the theatre.

However, it would be a mistake to underestimate the effectiveness of *A Streetcar Named Desire* as cold war propaganda. Despite the laughter, the spectators leave the theatre with a sense of futility. Innate aggressiveness and sexuality are associated, in the picture as in the play, with a class viewpoint and a slur against the foreign born. The master of the Kowalski household is a "Polack," and a representative of the lower classes.

Women are the victims of brutality, but they are shown as

having the usual responsibility for arousing the male's baser instincts. Blanche flirts with her brother-in-law. When he attacks her while his wife is at the hospital to have her baby, he says: "We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" Thus the rape is really not a rape. It grows out of uncontrollable instincts of people driven by desire (as is suggested in the title of the work.) Women, especially women like Blanche and her sister who are de-classed and have lost their secure place in society, must accept the world as it is or escape into insanity. Blanche takes the latter course. But the wife ignores what has happened. She weeps when her sister is taken away to an asylum, but she clings submissively to her husband and her baby.

The people in these films live in the chamber of horrors which Freud regards as man's predestined dwelling place. Freud summarizes human relationships in these terms:

"Their neighbor is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him."^{*}

This is the "American way of life" as it is seen by the movies. But there must be some answer to the social riddle. Wall Street wants to frighten people into submission. But industry and war cannot be served by ghosts or madmen.

What, then, is Hollywood's answer to the riddle of despair?

6. mother-informer

IN THE YEAR 388 B.C., Aristophanes produced a play entitled *Plutus*. The poet observed the corruption that accompanied the decline

^{*} *Civilization and its Discontents*, p. 85.

of Athenian power. In *Plutus*, there is a scene in which an Informer appears, leading a Witness. When someone observes, "An Informer! What impudence! He's ravenously hungry, that's certain," the Informer answers: "You shall follow me this very instant to the market-place, where the torture of the wheel shall force the confession of your misdeeds from you." A Just Man intervenes, saying he hopes for the destruction of "these vile informers:"

Informer: You are laughing at me. Well, then I denounce you as their accomplice.

Just Man: Like a thief you sneak yourself in where you have no business. You are hated by all and you claim to be an honest man.

Informer: What, you fool? I have not the right to dedicate myself entirely to my country's service?

Just Man: Is the country served by vile intrigue? . . . I pity Athens for being in such vile clutches."*

2339 years later, an event took place in Pittsburgh which seemed like the invention of a modern Aristophanes. The Greek dramatist never imagined a joke more devastating than the celebration of Cvetic Day in the Pennsylvania City. The holiday was declared in order to publicize the world premiere of a film honoring the informer, Cvetic, one of the lowest of the base breed. Since Pittsburgh was the scene of his disreputable activities as a police spy, it was selected for the premiere. A parade marched through the streets to the theatre where *I Was a Communist for the FBI* was shown. The public was not impressed. Although tickets for the opening were distributed at reduced prices, the theatre was half empty and the picture was a failure.

However, the farcical proceedings in Pittsburgh are not an isolated occurrence. The stoolpigeon has become an important figure, not only in politics, but in the nation's cultural life. Aristophanes' play indicates that honest people in Athens were still able to laugh at the antics of the political spy. But there is little laughter in the United States today.

* *Complete Greek Drama*, edited by Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr., 2 vols., New York (1938), Vol. II, pp. 1097-1102.

For several months during 1952, the story of an informer headed the best seller lists. Whittaker Chambers' *Witness* achieved its wide circulation through one of the most remarkable promotional campaigns in the history of publishing. The book will undoubtedly become a motion picture, but its influence on Hollywood will not be limited to a single production. It will be imitated in dozens, and probably hundreds, of films.

The *Saturday Review*, always a reliable barometer of the literary climate, gives unprecedented space to the book—nine pages, featuring five reviews, two being reasonably objective while the other three are hymns of praise. (This is impartiality, as the editors of the *Saturday Review* understand it).

According to the favorable notices, *Witness* is a masterpiece. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. compares it to the *Autobiography* of Lincoln Steffens. John Dos Passos places it "somewhere between Dostoevski's 'The Possessed' and the narratives of the adventures of the light within like 'Pilgrim's Progress' and George Fox's 'Journal'. . . ." The cream of the jest is the appearance of Richard M. Nixon as the third member of the group of literary critics. Nixon's presence gives the show away: the new addition to the world's great literature is blessed by a man who publicly advocates suppression of ideas and imprisonment of writers.

Dos Passos is no less fervent than Nixon in urging thought-control. Not content with the persecution of authors, Dos Passos wants to extend the witch-hunt to readers who dislike Chambers' work. He holds that everyone who doubts Chambers' veracity is under "Communist influence!" The existence of such doubts raises questions in his mind, which, he tells us, are "so grave and urgent that a man breaks out in a cold sweat to think of them." Here is the question that troubles Dos Passos: "Can it be that the 'liberals' who control communication in the press and the radio and the schools and the colleges of this country have already crawled under the yoke of the Communist Party? I mean in spirit. We know they are not dues-paying members."*

The absurdity of the question is breath-taking. But it is not so absurd when we consider that it echoes the thesis of Chambers'

* *Saturday Review*, May 24, 1952.

book, which argues that all rational thought, all ideas of human betterment and progress, grow out of a criminal conspiracy. Chambers calls it "the treason of ideas," and he defines it as "the vision of man's liberated mind, by the sole forces of its rational intelligence, redirecting man's destiny and reorganizing man's life and the world . . . reducing the meaningless chaos of nature, by imposing on it his rational will to order, abundance, security, peace."

No wonder Chambers shudders and Dos Passos breaks into a cold sweat at the thought that such notions are abroad in the land. Chambers says that the criminal vision "is shared by millions who are not Communists. . . ." In fact, it was shared by everyone who voted for the New Deal, as Chambers points out: "Consciously or unconsciously," writes Chambers, "a majority of the nation has so voted for years."*

Chambers is one of a growing multitude of informers, as "ravenously hungry" as the spies who infested Athens. It is an axiom of history, proven over 3000 years, that informers are always corrupt and always liars. As Zechariah Chaffee, Jr. observes, "The very nature of a spy's work requires lying."** Since the political informer always tells the same lies, the work does not require any special aptitude except a dead conscience.

There is no need to examine Chambers' motives, which are as mercenary as those of his competitors. He has been better paid than others, because he has made a useful contribution to the propaganda of fascism. He has introduced the stoolpigeon into our culture as a "spiritual" hero. He has done this by sacrilegiously dramatizing his experience as a religious adventure. Having identified all faith in democracy and rational progress as mortal sin, he tells us that he went through a soul-stirring crisis when he recognized that he had sinned. He solved the spiritual crisis by deciding to devote his life to atonement—on the witness stand.

The legend of the stoolpigeon's sin and atonement carries the theory of Man's criminal impulses into practical politics. We have discussed the society of the snake-pit shown on the screen in such films as *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In that film, Kowalski is pre-

sented sympathetically, because his sin consists in such normal pursuits as beating his wife and raping his sister-in-law. But Man's evil nature leads to the cardinal and unforgivable sin when he turns from personal crime to politics, and dares to entertain criminal beliefs in reason and human rights.

Chambers presents his flight from reason as a triumph over Man's criminal nature. Since anyone is liable to commit the sin of thinking about "order, abundance, security, peace" (this is Chambers' own definition of "the treason of ideas"), everyone must be watched, and the whole society becomes a hive of spics.

While other heroes have gone forth to fight dragons and giants, the new hero has his work cut out for him as a witness. He is the most submissive hero the world has ever known, offering predigested and rehearsed testimony. Chambers tells us that the noblest conduct demanded by our society—aside from quick death on the battlefield—is to spy on one's neighbors and police "dangerous thoughts." In giving an emotional and dramatic impact to this fantastic reversal of all accepted standards of honor and courage, Chambers renders a signal service to the fascist drive.

It remains to be seen whether the emotional and dramatic impact can be transferred to the screen. We can be sure that the question is being discussed by studio executives, and that story departments are searching for material which shows conversion to fascism as a "spiritual adventure." In conducting preliminary experiments along these lines, Hollywood has made the greatest sacrifice of which it is capable: it has courted box office failure. Naturally enough, Hollywood's first attempt to make an informer wholly sympathetic relies on the appeal of mother love.

Government hearings and trials have turned up many varieties of the *genus* stoolpigeon. In addition to the "tortured intellectual" like Whittaker Chambers, we have had the wise-cracking comedian, the man who systematically recruited friends in order to turn in their names, the spy who "lived three lives," as well as the more common types of sex perverts, thieves and drunkards. A brother and sister-in-law provided the testimony in the notorious Rosenberg frameup. It remains for the movies to introduce the mother-informer, presented with all the trappings of false sentiment in *My Son John*.

* *Witness*, New York, 1952.

** "Spies into Heroes," *The Nation*, June 28, 1952.

Ilya Ehrenburg has said of another film, *The Iron Curtain*: "A burglar does not realize what an honest man feels—he can only break open doors, not hearts." The attempt to open hearts in *My Son John* is ludicrous. But it affords an insight into the moral rottenness of fascism as it manifests itself in personal life.

The film deals with a family and tries to give Freudian significance to the "menace" of Communism, by linking it to a mother-son relationship. The animosity between the father and son in the picture arises from the fact that John has committed the "mortal sin" of questioning the existent order of society, represented by the father's American Legion brand of "patriotism." The mother tries to save John by giving information to the FBI. Her act brings the son's regeneration. But it comes too late. He must die as penance for his sin.

The picture has the usual melodramatic sub-plot, about the young man's "treasonable" activities. But the sub-plot is so slight that it is hardly noticed. John's "guilt by association" is simply taken for granted. From a dramatic point of view, it seems curious that the makers of the film feel no obligation to show what John did or why he did it. His possession of the key to the apartment of a woman suspected of "spying" is proof that he has been (to use the film's delicate language) "intimate, very intimate" with her. But there is no explanation of the nefarious business in which both are supposedly engaged, and not the slightest reference to John's reasons for his actions. This absence of motivation is so absurd, even by Hollywood standards, that it would have been remedied if it were found in the script of any cheap gangster story.

The failure to explain John's motives is intentional. The picture must convince us that John's crime is really "thinking." In the opening scenes, the father is disturbed because his son is an intellectual, who is not as devoted to the church as the other members of the family. This is enough to enable the father to guess that his son is a traitor. To go into details of his alleged "sedition" would weaken the premise that anyone who questions the *status quo* is likely to steal atomic secrets.

The anti-intellectualism of the theme is projected in a scene in which the Legionnaire warns his wife that their son is being led astray by "dangerous thoughts." The father sneers at education,

saying that children should be taught something more "spiritual" than reading, writing and arithmetic. He disparages books with the remark that "there is plenty of good writing on bad checks." The startling thing about this scene is the fact that the Legionnaire is drunk. Superficially, it seems astonishing that the statement of the basic theme should be delivered by a man so intoxicated that he falls downstairs three times (the last time for a comedy ending to the scene).

Leo McCarey, who made *My Son John*, is too experienced, and too conscious of political issues, to have any doubt of the effect the scene would achieve. The drunkenness is McCarey's way of translating the Nazi slogan: "When I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun." When the Legionnaire hears the word culture, he reaches for his bottle. In the warped philosophy of the film, this is good "Americanism," an antidote to the smugness of intellectuals. When men like the Legionnaire imitate Hitler's stormtroopers, as they did at Peckskill or Cicero, Illinois, they are generally intoxicated. The drunkenness in the picture is designed to set the tone for such acts of violence.

The vigilante appeal precludes any consideration of the intellectual's crime. It is enough that he wants to think for himself. When John's mother is visited by a representative of the FBI, she at first expresses antagonism: "I don't see why I should tell you anything." The investigator meekly admits that "our methods are often criticized," and launches into a lyrical description of the nobility of his calling.

The mother is soon convinced and realizes that her drunken husband is wiser than she, because he "thinks with his heart." In pleading with her son to repent and confess, she carries forward the theme that free speech must be outlawed. John is scheduled to speak at the commencement exercises at the university from which he graduated. The mother is more concerned about this prospect than about his unexplained crimes. She tells him that she will resort to any means to stop him: "Do you think I'll let you poison their minds?"

The picture treats John's "regeneration" at the end as casually as it has handled all his other motivations. There is not the slightest explanation of his decision to go to the FBI and tell them

the mysteries he is supposed to have concealed. But, since his associates are intellectuals, they have no hesitation in adding murder to their other crimes. John is killed, but before his death, he makes a phonograph record, which takes his place at the commencement exercises. One wonders whether there is any intentional symbolism in the use of the mechanical voice. At all events, John's speech is a thoroughly mechanized demand for fascist regimentation.

The acceptance of the mother's stoolpigeon role is the film's obligatory scene. Nothing like it has ever appeared on the screen in the United States. (One may assume that there were many films of this type made in Nazi Germany). Just as it is necessary to have the Legionnaire drunk when he denounces education and culture, so it is necessary to have the mother in a state of wild hysteria, on the verge of insanity, when she turns against her son.

The mother's threatened insanity is somewhat similar to the madness that engulfs the leading character in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In *My Son John*, the political message concealed in these pictures is brought out into the open. The immorality that stems from the "depravity of human nature" is now identified as political depravity. The mother sees that she is living in a snakepit, because radicalism has corrupted the environment. She can climb out of the snake-pit only by total submission to "God," who is represented by the authority of the state.

In making her submission, she is necessarily deprived of all dignity, reduced to irrational sobs and screams—because her act denies that human beings have any right to think or reason. The scene hints at a sort of Freudian bond between the mother and the FBI agent. She talks to him about his mother and how he must love her. Thus her thwarted feeling for her "seditious" son is transferred to the representative of authority.

It is tragic that an actress of Helen Hayes' stature should dishonor herself and her art by playing such a role. It may be argued that Miss Hayes was confused by the film's vulgar misuse of religious sentiment to decorate the Nazi preachment. But it is hardly flattering to the actress to suppose she does not know that the picture is war propaganda and an open attack on our nation's democratic traditions. If she is not aware of this, she should now be convinced by the critical condemnation of the film.

Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* describes it as "cultural vigilantism." Alton Cook of the *New York World-Telegram* says that the Legionnaire "would have most of the population endlessly undergoing loyalty tests," and notes that his "slogans . . . have a strong flavor of fascism."

The only praise for *My Son John* has come from persons whose hatred of democracy is a matter of public record. George Sokolsky tells us that he saw the picture twice, and "I could not restrain my tears on both occasions." On his second visit, Sokolsky reports that he "saw it with a party of devoted souls who fight Communism." One is touched by the thought of these spics, FBI agents and Hitler admirers, weeping at the mother's plight. Sokolsky rejoices that the picture brings a lesson to the middle class family: "It might be your family or mine . . ." he writes, "It is so universal in our lives." He notes that the universal danger is the power of ideas: "The character, John, obviously is tortured throughout by the conflict between ideas and the spirit and in the end returns to God."²

Audiences apparently saw nothing "universal," or even understandable, in the film. Walter Winchell summarizes the economic facts: "Paramount chalks up *My Son John* as one of the costliest box office flops in history."

There is no informer among the characters in *I Want You*. But it is significant as one of the few Hollywood films which tries to draw a positive picture of the kind of society *My Son John* aims to achieve. There is no need of a stoolpigeon in *I Want You*, because everyone in it is too cowed to speak seriously about anything.

The title gives the impression that it might describe a personal love story. But the "libido" in this case comes from the United States government. The people in the film seem to be dazed by the powerful attraction, bemused by the all-inclusive power of the state. They behave as if every word they say is being taken down for future hearings of the Un-American Committee.

I Want You introduces us, again, to a "typical" middle class family. The Greers are honest, conventional people. The son of the household is angry and defiant when he is drafted for military

² Los Angeles *Herald-Express*, April 2, 1952.

service. His brother's wife, Nancy, gives him a patriotic lecture. When he returns home on leave from Korea, the experience has "made a man of him," and he tells Nancy how right she had been in attacking his reluctance to serve. One can imagine the reaction of any veteran of the Korean fighting to this extraordinary result of service in the Orient!

The climax brings Nancy face to face with the necessity of relinquishing her own husband to the war effort. Although he is married and has children, his special knowledge and experience are needed. Nancy tearfully agrees. His mother says, "All my life I've been saying good-bye to my sons." The picture ends with the younger son's wedding, which brings a note of gaiety and distracts attention from the mournful stress on the "inevitability" of war.

The argument for total conformity in *I Want You* is presented in relation to an elderly man, George Kress. Aside from the son's brief protest at the beginning of the story, Kress is the only person in the picture who questions the desirability of the war. Kress is driven to distraction by the news of his son's death in Korea. He is drunk and maudlin when he makes his mild criticism of the war. No one takes him seriously. The characters who hear him are apologetic and embarrassed. Thus the audience is assured that no sane person could hold the views expressed by Kress. The right to think for himself is as completely outlawed as in *My Son John*.

Since there can be no discussion of real problems, the dialogue is incredibly feeble. The Colonel who tells Martin Greer that Uncle Sam wants him talks as if he had lost his mind. He tells Greer that things are "scary" in Washington. He finds it "amazing in a country like this," that there are not enough specialists available for military needs. The situation, he says, cannot be defined: "It isn't peace exactly. I don't know what you'd call it."

Martin and his wife converse in worn-out clichés: Martin says he must serve because his small son may ask in later years: "What did you do, daddy, in the war against Communism?" In a farewell scene with his daughter, Martin tells the child a story about a little girl who went to New Orleans, became Queen of the Carnival, and had all the jewels and fine clothes she wanted. Martin is giving his life for his country—in a safe job, which is not likely to expose him to any greater danger than the graft in Washington—in order

that his daughter may have the inalienable right to be Queen for a Day, or even Miss America.

It is not surprising that this mess of banalities was written by Irwin Shaw, the man who withdrew *Bury the Dead*, fearing that the anti-war play he wrote in the thirties might serve the cause of peace today.

Samuel Goldwyn is said to have produced *I Want You* in the hope that it would duplicate the success of *The Best Years of Our Lives*. The frustrations of the men who returned from the last war were to be answered, according to Goldwyn's plan, by the call for a new conflict. The irony of the earlier picture's title was to be forgotten, and people were to be told that they could recreate the best years of their lives—the unity and national spirit of the war years—in support of another world conflict. That one of the more intelligent Hollywood producers could think in such twisted terms and with such a misunderstanding of popular feeling, is a commentary on the present dilemma of the industry.

Irving Hoffman reports the reception of the film in Western Germany: "Now Goldwyn's 'I Want You,' an animated recruiting poster, is being booked into Germany. And being booed out of it. The lithographs are being defaced with 'We don't want YOU!' scribbled across them by Berliners and others."*

The same reaction is reported from other parts of Europe. It is to be hoped that audiences in the United States, and around the world, will tell Hollywood that they don't want its propaganda for war and fascism.

* *Hollywood Reporter*, May 9, 1952.

Part III

TOWARD A PEOPLE'S FILM ART

1. two camps in the world of film

THE BATTLE OF IDEAS is world-wide. In an article entitled "Two Camps in the World of Film," John Alexander, the British film critic, writes:

"Today, when the progress of films in the countries of socialism and people's democracy, together with the struggles of film workers in the capitalist world, poses more sharply than ever before the issue, "What constitutes a progressive film?", the peoples of the world are assessing their own countries' past and present contributions in a new way, in the light of the struggle for peace and national independence, a struggle in which the working people are taking the lead."*

In formulating the cultural tasks that confront us in the United States, it is incumbent on us to assess our country's past and present contributions in a new way. In the motion picture field, we must examine the question posed by Alexander: "What constitutes a progressive film?"

We have analyzed negative aspects of the question. But the critique of the film culture of imperialism is only the beginning of our task. We who have experience in writing and producing films have an obligation to create material which genuinely reflects the aspirations and national interests of the people of our country.

At present, as always in the past, the more creative and progressive aspects of our cultural life are enriched by contact with the cultures of other lands. Walt Whitman sang proudly of our prairies and cities, but he also saluted the world:

* *Modern Quarterly*, Winter, 1951-52.

"I will acknowledge contemporary lands,
I will trail the whole geography of the globe
and salute courteously every city large and small."

There is much to learn concerning the function of the film, its potentialities as a people's art, from study of the motion pictures produced in the Soviet Union, China and the people's democracies.

Persons in our country who entertain doubts about the peaceful intentions of these nations might be reassured by the complete absence of war incitements in their films, and the equally complete absence of themes of violence, brutality and pornography. The system of ideas in these films reflects a personal and social morality which differs in every respect from the Hollywood "way of life."

Hollywood's invitation to death is answered, in the motion pictures of these countries, with a passionate affirmation of the life spirit. While Hollywood glorifies gangster heroes, the Soviet Union portrays the life of the great composer, Moussorgsky, or the great Ukrainian poet, Taras Shevchenko. While Hollywood attacks science and thought, the Soviet cinema creates a reverend paean to the creative power of science in *Life in Bloom*. While Hollywood shows workers as "primitive brutes," the Soviet Union shows *Miners of the Donets* building a new society through their creative labor. While Hollywood shows men beating women into submission, Soviet films show women assuming leadership in every field of activity.

The Soviet Union has made many pictures dealing with the anti-fascist war. The suffering and heroism of the Russian people in the great patriotic effort that led to the defeat of the Hitler invasion, transformed the nation's culture and inspired Soviet film-makers. But nowhere in these pictures is there the idealization of military brutality which is found even in the best of the films made in Hollywood during the Second World War. Most striking about the Soviet pictures is the intimate study of individuals in their reaction to the war experience—the discovery of inner resources of the spirit, the heroism of the people in occupied villages, the activity of partisans behind the lines.

The Young Guard, with its beautiful presentation of the lives of young men and women learning to face the tremendous responsibilities placed upon them, is one of the best of the Soviet films. It

is also one of the most characteristic in its treatment of heroism as a process of growth, its emphasis on love and comradeship as the basis of patriotism, its hatred of militarism, and its respect for the part that women played in the struggle.

The Young Guard and other Soviet productions reflect the experience of a country in which the whole population was mobilized to meet an invading enemy. Films of the Second World War, made in the United States, reflect a different national experience. Hollywood dealt with soldiers fighting far from home, for a cause which they did not fully understand, in an army organized on the basis of caste and rigid discipline. Hollywood tended to stress the soldier's cynicism, unreasoning courage, hatred of "foreigners," contempt for women.

The contrast between the Soviet films made in the years following the Second World War, and those made in the United States, points to the increasing divergence in the cinematic cultures of the two countries. Within a few years after the war, Soviet film-makers had completed the cycle of war films, and turned to a considerable extent to other themes. But Hollywood moved to an increasingly direct glorification of militarism, not only in pictures depicting the Korean conflict, but in films which revert to the Second World War in order to reinterpret its meaning and to show it as preparation for a third world holocaust.

Hollywood has even gone back to *What Price Glory?*, re-making the film to eliminate the mildly anti-war sentiment of the nineteen-twenties, and to depict soldiers of the United States as careless conquerors, endowed with superiority over their European allies in sex as well as in battle.

While Hollywood makes a hero of a Nazi General in *The Desert Fox*, Soviet film-makers have soberly examined the significance of the Nazi defeat in *The Fall of Berlin*. The picture exposes the lack of full cooperation among the nations fighting Hitler. But the issue is stated fairly, in terms of the meeting at Yalta and the conclusions which the Soviet leaders were bound to draw from Churchill's opposition to a second front. The interplay of forces and personalities at the conference, the sympathetic portrait of Roosevelt, the emphasis on the growing understanding between him and Stalin, make the scene a masterpiece of historical interpretation.

The Fall of Berlin is remarkable in its use of cinematic technique.

A memorable example of the use of contrasting images to heighten the emotional impact is the intercutting of the wedding of Hitler and Eva Braun in a cellar under the ruined city, with scenes in the Berlin subway, showing men, women and children being drowned as a result of the Nazi decision to flood the subway. The marriage ceremony, almost grotesque in its slow movement and false sentiment, provides a profound social comment on the frantic struggle of the citizens as the water engulfs them.

The sequence in *The Fall of Berlin* in which the red flag is carried through furious fighting, step by step, and floor by floor, to the summit of the gutted Reichstag, has a pictorial intensity which may be compared with the scenes in which the Union flag is carried forward in *The Red Badge of Courage*. Both sequences are noteworthy in their technical expertness. But there is a complete divergence of social viewpoints. *The Red Badge of Courage* tells us that the battle is futile and that the flag-bearer is half insane. In *The Fall of Berlin*, dialogue and closeups emphasize the conscious purpose and moral conviction in every movement of the men carrying the flag.

The main trend of the Soviet film in the past few years has been away from military themes. Historical pictures are less concerned with the panorama of battles, and more with the popular and cultural aspects of Russian history. *Taras Shevchenko* tells the story of the nineteenth century poet who rose from serfdom to write songs of freedom, which led to his imprisonment and the order to destroy all his poems. The film is a tribute to the traditions of the Ukrainian people in their long struggle against Tsarist oppression. Its theme is the power of ideas, the power of song. It is permeated with hatred of militarism, expressed in Shevchenko's determined refusal to obey the tsar's order that he be trained as a soldier.

The contrast in method and viewpoint between the Soviet film and the work produced in Hollywood may be illustrated by comparison of two pictures dealing with biographical material—the Hollywood life of Toulouse-Lautrec, entitled *Moulin Rouge*, and the Soviet film, *Moussorgsky*. Even the titles of the films suggest a difference in theme and emphasis. Hollywood requires a background of can-can dancers and ribald entertainment to embellish

the career of the nineteenth century artist. In a superficial sense, the Hollywood treatment is "realistic," for it is true that Toulouse-Lautrec made a magnificent pictorial record of the night life of Paris. However, the essence of the artist's work lies in his bitter and profoundly human portrayal of the people of the streets and cabarets.

In *Moulin-Rouge*, the artist's love of people and the sense of brooding tragedy in his sketches are replaced by a shallow and reactionary presentation of the theme that "great art" is found in the gutter, in drunkenness and despair. In the picture, the deformed dwarf leaves his aristocratic home to find "life." He goes to the "people," the prostitutes and entertainers and dandies of the Paris boulevards. There is not one word in the film to suggest that the artist is interested in creative problems. He is portrayed as devoted to his art, but his feeling about it is expressed solely in scenes which show him painting or sketching. The emphasis is on sex frustration and drunkenness. In fact, the picture opens with a scene in which he disposes of a whole bottle of brandy, and he drinks steadily, and in increasing quantities, in almost every scene.

Moussorgsky deals with a musician who, in his later life, was an embittered and tragic figure. Drunkenness is a "real" factor in Moussorgsky's life, and indeed it is more interesting than his music to some of his English and American biographers. The Soviet filmmakers display no interest in the "psychological" difficulties and personal frustrations of their protagonist. They assume that the historical reality of his career lies in his vast creative accomplishment, his influence on the culture of his time, his place in the development of a national musical idiom.

The two films express two fundamentally opposing views of life and art. The Hollywood production sees life as sordid, without dignity or meaning, and art as a sort of drug that enables exceptionally gifted persons to mock the destructive forces that surround the individual. The Soviet picture sees life in terms of aspiration and struggle, and art as a link between the individual and the creative life of the people.

In dealing with the materials of contemporary life, Soviet pictures are chiefly concerned with problems of work and reconstruction,

the day-to-day lives of workers and collective farmers and intellectuals. Heroic stature is achieved, not through violence or personal assertiveness, but through social contributions or the invention of labor-saving devices or artistic achievement. The people on the screen seem to have lost the impulse of aggression which Hollywood ascribes to the "eternal" nature of man.

Some progressives in the United States find these films "dull," because they ignore the dramatic values of abnormal tensions and neurotic clashes. *Miners of the Donets* has been criticized for the "placidity" of the action. There are, indeed, no Freudian "compulsions" in the film. But the intensity with which these people work and live gives the story a spiritual dimension that is unknown in Hollywood's meretricious dramas.

Monopoly control of film exhibition makes it unlikely that *Miners of the Donets* will be seen by large numbers of miners in the United States. But members of the United Mine Workers might not find it dull to compare the death traps in which they labor with the beautifully lighted and equipped mines shown in the Soviet film. Miners in this country might find it instructive to compare their homes and union halls with the homes of Donets workers and the elaborate club house in which they hold banquets and entertainments.

Alexander Borisov, the fine actor who plays the part of Moussorgsky in the film of that name, writes of the Sixth International Film Festival, held at Karlovy Vary in 1951, noting that the United States was not among the twenty-two countries represented at the festival. Borisov remarks that Hollywood boycotted the event on the ground that the pictures shown there "were not true art, but 'propaganda'!" Borisov continues:

"For my part, I cannot see why films telling how peasants healed their ravaged land, built a new village, made it bright with electricity, and found a happy life, should be censured. I am much more inclined to question the value of releasing films showing thugs robbing a bank and killing people."^{*}

^{*} *News*, Moscow, U.S.S.R., Aug. 31, 1951.

The essential quality of the films produced in the Soviet Union, as well as those made in China and the people's democracies of Eastern Europe, is their joyous confidence, the faith in the future. This quality is like a radiance illuminating such documentaries as *Peace Will Win* and *The New China*. In both these films, the most creative thing is the faces, especially the faces of young people. A comparison of closeups in the two films with closeups of Hollywood stars is like a lesson in history.

Peace Will Win, the picturization of the peace congress held at Warsaw in 1950, achieves an extraordinary extension through the participation of the citizens of Poland. In *The New China*, we see people holding freedom in their hands as closely and surely as a child is held, with the deep passion for life that people feel for their children. These are people who have made a new world, and they are proud in the knowledge of their accomplishment, serene in the grasp of the tasks ahead.

Films made in the lands where the people control production have a simple and direct appeal to the people of capitalist countries—because these films speak the language of human feeling. In spite of the vigilance of the witch-hunters, the lovely Soviet cartoon, *The Magic Horse*, has delighted millions of people in the United States through television. In order to prevent audiences from knowing that it comes from the Soviet Union, the work has been presented in its several appearances on television screens, without credit to its creators, under the title, *Over the Rainbow*.

In England, popular interest in pictures of Soviet activity is indicated in the response to the showing of *Moscow Reconstruction* in Twickenham. The *Surry Comet* carried a front page account of the special screening for members of the Town Council and their families and friends. After the showing, the Council expressed its pleasure at having had the opportunity to see "this amazing film."^{*}

When examined in comparison with these Soviet pictures, the Hollywood product seems incredibly synthetic and inhuman. It does not come to foreign countries as a messenger of good will, but as an article of conquest. In all the Marshall Plan countries, the aggressive

^{*} *World News and Views*, London, Feb. 7, 1953.

demands of the film monopoly have gone far toward destroying national film industries.

Cosmopolitanism may seem like a strange word to some intellectuals, but it is a real and oppressive force to the people of France, Italy, England and Western Germany, who find the expression of their national traditions subordinated to Wall Street's machine-made version of what the imperialists call "Western civilization." Hollywood films exemplify the "universal values" cultivated by cosmopolitanism. Ignoring the realities of our own national life, Hollywood creates a world of rootless, greedy robots, whose lives are lived in night clubs and salons. These pictures are as insulting to the people of the United States as to the people of other lands.

With the growing strength of the forces of peace and democracy throughout the world, the struggle against Wall Street's "art" will be intensified. The people of every country will demand films which reflect their own culture and history and contemporary experience.

The demand will also arise, with increasing urgency, in the United States.

2. what can be done about Hollywood?

THE ANALYSIS of the propaganda role of films is designed to stimulate practical activity—the kind of activity which, unhappily, has not yet developed on a broad scale in the United States. There is as yet no broad movement of audience organization, led by the working class, to oppose Hollywood's anti-democratic and immoral propaganda and to seek a healthier film culture.

A mass campaign is possible and necessary; it can win wide support and make its effect felt on the screen. Such a mass campaign can also create more favorable conditions for the production and distribution of genuinely independent films, reflecting the interests and aspirations of the people.

Yet this proposition, which seems self-evident, is apparently subject to a good deal of questioning on the part of many progressives. The struggle against the corrupting influence of Hollywood pictures is weakened and delayed by confusion as to how the struggle is to be conducted—or whether it can be conducted at all. Many people seem to feel that nothing can be done about the commercial film, and that we might as well abandon all efforts to resist Hollywood's reactionary propaganda.

The persecution of film workers by the Un-American Committee and the industry's wholesale exclusion of competent craftsmen on grounds of "political unreliability," has evoked considerable protest, but it has also, in certain minds, tended to confirm the view that protest is ineffectual.

This pessimistic view underestimates the very real results achieved by the resistance to thought control. The hundreds of men and women who have courageously opposed the Un-Americans have made a vital contribution to the defense of the Constitution and its Bill of Rights. The struggle has exposed the aims of the fascist drive and enlisted broadening support. The growing opposition to McCarthyism and its accompaniment of thought control trials and "investigations" has been influenced, to a considerable extent, by the patriotic position taken by witnesses who risked their careers, and in some cases incurred jail sentences, to defend basic Constitutional rights.

The fight against thought control is most effective when the defense of the individual's freedom of conscience and belief is linked to the defense of the people's cultural rights, demanding a culture that reflects democratic needs and interests, against the "culture" of decadence and death.

The idea that it is futile to attack Hollywood's film propaganda indicates lack of confidence in the capacity of the masses to grasp the issues, and to organize effectively to influence the content of films. It indicates failure to see the *ideological* struggle, the struggle to expose and defeat fascist and war propaganda, in its necessary connection with the political and economic struggle.

It is certainly true that organized protest, however vigorous it may be, will not cause Wall Street to abandon its control of Hollywood or to cease the use of films for its class aims. We need

not hope that film magnates like Darryl Zanuck or Cecil B. De-Mille will be converted to the democratic faith. But mass pressure can force modifications in the content of films. This possibility grows out of the nature of the motion picture as propaganda.

Propaganda must be effective—it must influence the masses—in order to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie. Today Wall Street and Washington are trying to forestall a mass breakaway from their ideological control by moving as rapidly as possible to suppress books and thought itself. But the speed with which they move is not dependent solely on their will or their possession of police power. They must strive to maintain themselves in power with the aid of ideological ruses and rationalizations, expressed also in the sphere of culture.

The struggle against the corrupting influence of the commercial film must be combined with the struggle for an independent motion picture art, genuinely free from Wall Street control. The struggle on both fronts cannot fail to have an effect on the content of Hollywood films. If independent pictures are made, with the cooperation and support of trade unions and people's organizations, expressing the aspirations and meeting the needs of the masses of the people, Hollywood will try to divert audience interest from these offerings with watered-down versions of similar themes. Hollywood will attempt to imitate any work that achieves critical acclaim, here or abroad, for realism and artistic skill. Every picture that reflects the people's deep desire for peace and democracy will serve to increase the awareness of audiences to the sort of poison that Hollywood puts on the screen.

If there is mass pressure for changes in content, Hollywood will attempt to head it off by concessions. If the pressure is strong enough, Hollywood's response will involve real gains, which can be of value in the development of further pressure and the securing of greater gains. But nothing can be achieved by over-estimating these concessions, or ignoring the class interest that motivates them.

Changes in cinematic content will be designed to sow new illusions, to obscure basic issues and to head off protest. For example, it is possible to win jobs for Negro workers in the motion picture industry. It is also possible to force production of films

which give, at least to a limited extent, honest portrayals of Negro life. This would be a tremendous accomplishment. But it would *not* cut through the web of reformist illusions which the dominant culture seeks to impose. Only independent production, involving full participation and leadership of Negro artists, and free from the economic and political and ideological strait-jacket of Big Business control, can express in any profound and full sense the creative capacities and manifold experiences of the Negro people.

Changes in Hollywood film content will reflect the general relationship of forces in the nation, and will always remain within the context of the over-all strategy of finance capital. Tactical concessions do not lessen Wall Street's appetite for profits or its desire to exploit human misery.

How are we to explain the attitude of progressives who fight Wall Street in trade union or political activities, and at the same time leave unchallenged the ideological line of films made by Wall Street? How naive must one be to suppose that finance capital desires to popularize the revolt of the Negro people of Haiti in *Lydia Bailey*, or to endorse the revolutionary aspirations of Mexican peasants in *Viva Zapata!*

Such naiveté would occasion laughter or lamentation if we heard it expressed on economic or political questions. What would we say of a progressive trade unionist who praised the giant corporations for their sympathy for Negro workers and their opposition to Jim Crow? The praise is no less ridiculous when offered to the same corporations for their production of "Negro interest" films.

To view *The Well* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*, or even such an apparently innocuous film as *An American in Paris*, without class consciousness, without alertness and partisanship, is an abandonment of struggle on the vital ideological front.

A broad movement to expose the celluloid poison dishonestly labeled "entertainment" will include many people who do not understand the class character of art. The cooperation of people with different viewpoints and different levels of understanding is, of course, characteristic of all coalition activity. The struggle for peace and democracy involves many men and women who reject any fundamental criticism of capitalism. Many people are shocked by the threat of atomic war, and are at the same time unwilling

to believe that the United States is an imperialist power. Many workers are ready to fight for their rights without endorsing the theory of surplus value. It is similarly true that people who have never heard of the cultural superstructure are nonetheless opposed to films which incite to war, encourage crime, and degrade the human spirit.

However, deeper understanding strengthens democratic action. Sections of the middle class, including middle class intellectuals, are increasingly aware of the danger of war and the threat of fascism. But their awareness may bring only paralyzing fear, if their failure to understand the relationship of class forces leads them to overestimate the power of the dominant class and to underestimate the gathering strength of the working class and the Negro people.

This is the root of the tendency, among progressives and even among some responsible representatives of the Left, to accept the double illusion that "Hollywood films are not so bad," and that "nothing can be done about them anyway." Whether this view is expressed by middle class people or by workers (and it is not infrequently expressed by working class leaders), it stems from inability to understand the fundamental class character of culture. Those who applaud Hollywood's occasional "New Look" ventures are motivated by a desire to find some crumbs of comfort in what they basically regard as a hopeless situation; it seems "hopeless," because they are overawed by Wall Street's cultural dominance, unwilling to concede the possibilities of a broad movement for a democratic culture.

Underlying the passive acceptance of Wall Street's power over films and other forms of communication, is disdain for culture: since its class function is not seen, its value as a weapon in class struggle is not respected: the danger of its use by the bourgeoisie is belittled, and the possibilities of its use by the masses are ignored.

We must have very little faith in the common sense of the people of our country if we assume they cannot learn to see through the fraud perpetrated on their theatre screens. One need only stand in the lobby of a theatre and listen to the comments of the departing audience, to find that many of them feel a healthy disgust for the entertainment. The comments, to be sure, tend to cynicism

and apathy. But the industry's expensive advertising campaign, announcing foolishly that "movies are better than ever," is a confession of Hollywood's impotence in the face of passive sales-resistance.

The weakness of Hollywood is defined in falling box office receipts. The period of witch-hunts in the industry and fascist propaganda on the screen has witnessed a spectacular decline in attendance. An article published in *Life* in August, 1951, noted that during the previous year 100 theatres closed in Philadelphia, 31 in Cleveland, 134 in the state of California. The one year saw 3,000 movie houses shut their doors in the United States.*

Samuel Goldwyn estimated that there had been a drop of between fifteen and twenty million in audiences during 1951.** In 1944, 90 million tickets were sold each week in the United States. In 1952, sales dropped to 35 million per week. Hollywood attempts to blame television for its troubles, but detailed statistical studies do not support this conclusion.***

The producers hope to meet the crisis by a "revolutionary" change in the physical presentation of films. 1953 is the year of three dimensions. "The 3-D panic is on in full force," observed the *Los Angeles Times* on February 8, 1953. The corporations are frantically testing the merits of three competing devices, Cinemascope, Cinemascope and Natural Vision. It remains to be seen whether sex and sadism can be made more alluring in three dimensions than in two.

Hollywood is prepared to spend millions on new mechanical equipment, at the same time imposing a crushing economic burden on exhibitors. Cinemascope installation in theatres will cost from \$5,000 to \$25,000, depending on the size of the auditorium. Cinemascope is far more expensive. Small exhibitors, unable to meet the expense, will be driven into bankruptcy, and monopoly control of exhibition will be tightened. Industry leaders foresee this develop-

* Robert Coughlan, "Now It Is Trouble That Is Supercolossal in Hollywood," *Life*, August 13, 1951.

** *Collier's*, September 29, 1951.

*** Geoffrey Wagner, "The Lost Audience," *Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television*, Summer, 1952.

ment, and hope that the decline in the number of theatres will bring bigger profits to the large chains and enable them to force an inferior product on audiences.

Because film is more than a commodity—it is propaganda—the film crisis is serious culturally as well as economically. It remains for effective audience organization to tell Hollywood why people do not like its films and what people want done about it.

3. audience organization

PUBLIC CAMPAIGNS, conducted in various communities and in some cases on a national scale, have demonstrated the effectiveness of audience organization. We may cite the long fight waged against the unspeakable slander of the Negro people in *The Birth of a Nation*. While the protest did not prevent the picture from amassing huge profits, it exposed its abominable racist lies to millions of people. Recent attempts to revive *The Birth of a Nation* have been met by an aroused public opinion which has greatly restricted its showing.

Jewish organizations and other progressive groups exposed the anti-Semitism in the English picture *Oliver Twist*; there can be no doubt that this campaign drastically curtailed the exhibition of the film and minimized its influence. There was a broad movement of protest against the adulation of the Nazis in *The Desert Fox*; while the movement failed to force Twentieth Century-Fox to repudiate and withdraw the film, it placed the studio on the defensive and caused the industry to abandon plans for similar pro-Nazi productions.

There has been a rewarding fight in certain areas for the showing of good foreign films, including those from the Soviet Union and the People's Democracies. Popular opposition to the system of block-booking has caused some limitation on monopoly control of exhibition, and has aided the efforts of independent exhibitors to secure films which meet community needs.

Audience demand for the showing of Chaplin's *Limelight* has in many places broken through the attempt to prevent the exhibition of the picture. Interest in *Limelight* may be attributed to Chaplin's vast popularity and world renown. But it is the truth and honesty of Chaplin's art that makes him loved by people everywhere. He has become, on the American screen, the symbol of the humanitarian and artistic values which reaction seeks to destroy. Audience interest in *Limelight* is an affirmation of these values.

The record proves that audience pressure is by no means ineffectual. It is also clear that it has not been mobilized on a scale that is commensurate with the public interest in films and the possibilities of broad cooperation of various groups and interests.

There are many problems of audience organization. We shall take up only certain questions of program. The first requirement, programmatically and organizationally, is labor's participation and leadership.

Up to the present time, the trade union movement has shown a rather striking apathy to motion pictures. Labor has tended to ignore the anti-labor propaganda that is displayed, or more or less concealed, in many current films. It is understandable that many leaders of the AFL, CIO and Railroad Brotherhoods, do not speak out against anti-Communist and war-inciting films, since these leaders have given their support to the war drive and its accompaniment of red-baiting. It is also not surprising that trade union officials who encourage discriminatory practices in their own organizations are insensitive to Hollywood's "white supremacy" propaganda. But unionists cannot be wholly indifferent to a powerful means of communication which has always falsified the life of American workers.

Hollywood's unwritten law decrees that only the middle and upper classes provide themes suitable for film presentation, and that workers shall appear on the screen only in subordinate or comic roles. There have been occasional infractions of the law. Pictures have dealt with working class families, generally in terms of the ambitions of young people to escape from poverty and cross "to the right side of the tracks." A few films, such as *How Green Was My Valley*, have dealt sentimentally and unrealistically with

strike situations. But it is significant that the scene of this "labor" film is not the Monongahela Valley of Pennsylvania, but a quaint region of Wales, and that the sympathy with which individual miners are treated is counter-balanced by the usual hints at the danger of "mob violence," and the usual emphasis on the good intentions of the employers.

During the 1930's, one film, *Grapes of Wrath*, dealt seriously with economic struggle. But it did not touch the problems of industrial workers, and its portrayal of the tragedy of migratory farm labor in California was marred by a negative and defeatist ending. There were stories of home front production during the Second World War, but it would be a gratuitous insult to labor to classify *Swingshift Maisie* as a film about workers.

The industry has avoided making films which are direct propaganda for the Taft-Hartley Law, although producers' repeated efforts to disrupt the organizations of film workers leave no doubt that they would be delighted to express their hatred of labor on the screen. The fact that the attack on labor is veiled, and accomplished by omission and innuendo, is a tribute to the strength of organized labor. But the attack, however carefully it may be camouflaged under the illusion of "pure entertainment," is no less damaging to the interests of workers.

The apathy of organized labor to this situation has historic roots in the contempt for culture of old-line trade union officials. Many of these leaders display a fear of ideas—except the familiar clichés of convention speeches—which is connected with their rejection of any theoretical approach to labor's class position and interests. Their hatred for theory makes them contemptuous of any creative or cultural expression, and their denial of class struggle includes blindness to the need of material explaining the aims of the trade union movement and reflecting the specific conditions and interests of workers.

Unhappily, as we have already suggested, some progressive trade unionists tend to share this contempt for culture. In view of the urgency of the ideological struggle, the sharpest criticism must be directed against trade union leaders who take a frivolous, uncritical approach to cultural problems, treating these problems as matters of individual taste and preference.

The persistent influence of economism in labor's ranks is indicated in the viewpoint not infrequently expressed, even by militant and class conscious trade union officials, that "immediate issues are too pressing to permit consideration of culture," or that "workers like bad films and television shows and comic books, and nothing can be done about it." It is undoubtedly true that many workers, and not a few of their responsible leaders, accept the corrupt stuff that Big Business sells in the guise of "entertainment." The extent of this pernicious influence is proof of the danger, which can be met by consistent educational work, concrete analysis of monopoly-controlled communications, and mass campaigns against anti-labor propaganda.

Communists in the labor movement bear some of the responsibility for the tendency to ignore or underestimate the importance of cultural struggle. Trade unionists who recognize the living value of Marxist theory in dealing with day-to-day political and economic problems, do not possess the same intimate knowledge of Marxist cultural theory, which they include in their general estimate of culture as something apart and separate, "highbrow," and "out of their class"—the phrase, which is not uncommon, suggests the acceptance of ruling class control of culture and unwillingness to cut through the illusions concerning culture propagated by the bourgeoisie.

The labor movement pays a heavy price for compromising with these illusions. Workers and their families see films which urge them to despise the values by which they live, and to emulate the corrupt values of their enemies. Big Business is in the happy position of making the workers pay for propaganda against themselves. The consistent presentation on the nation's screens of the view that working class life is to be despised and that workers who seek to protect their class interests are stupid, malicious, or even treasonable, has its effect on every strike and every labor struggle.

In the past three years, workers have begun to appear on the screen—in anti-Communist pictures, which are based on the theory that militant trade union activity is "seditious." The red-baiting is designed primarily to weaken and destroy the labor movement. As the trade unions become increasingly aware of the fascist danger, they cannot avoid recognizing the role that Hollywood is play-

ing in the ideological preparation for fascism and war. It is tragic that recognition of this simple fact has been so long delayed.

The Negro people constitute a potent force, which can be mobilized in alliance with labor and the masses of the people, for democratic and progressive films, for an end of Hollywood's Jim Crow policies, and for real attention—not only in a few pictures but in a large part of the industry's product—to the role that the Negro people play in the popular movements and changes of our time.

Here again, theoretical clarity is a guide to action. It is instructive to consider what might have happened at the time of the appearance of the first cycle of pictures embodying Hollywood's "New Look" at Negro themes, if sections of the labor movement, together with Negro organizations, had used the cycle as the basis for sharp demands upon the industry.

The widespread public interest in *Lost Boundaries*, *Pinky*, *Intruder in the Dust* and *Home of the Brave*, created opportunities for building a broad campaign, recognizing what was new in the "New Look," noting the continuance of the basic pattern of white chauvinism, and making concrete demands for more meaningful concessions.

While Negro audiences recognized the importance of assigning dignified and leading roles to Negro performers, the Negro press and public did not assume that Hollywood had suddenly mended its ways. There was obviously no change in the industry's Jim Crow pattern. The Negro people did not see themselves adequately portrayed in the portrait of a Negro soldier paralyzed by "psychological" feelings of inferiority, or in a Negro woman (played, of course, by a white actress) who learns to "know her place" among her own people, abandoning the attempt to "escape" through marriage to a white man.

The Negro people were not bemused and enchanted by this "New Look" at the old stereotypes. But a wide range of progressive opinion, from left of center to Communist, assumed that Hollywood (in the fourth year of the cold war, forsooth!) had at last handled Negro themes with an honorable clarity that required no criticism.

Many leaders of labor and people's organizations, including

some spokesmen for the Left, hailed the films with unstinting applause. Jerome's convincing analysis of the four pictures in *The Negro in Hollywood Films* created a strong impression. But the pamphlet did not receive the organized support and wide circulation that would have stimulated a campaign along the lines suggested by Jerome. On the contrary, many of the men and women who were in positions to give leadership to such a campaign continued to insist that it was "unwise" to attack the films, holding on the one hand that the Hollywood moguls needed "encouragement" to make further friendly gestures to the Negro people, and on the other hand maintaining that the Negro people were not prepared to join in any protest, being "glad" to have any representation, however limited, on the Jim Crow screens of the United States.

The latter argument contains a large element of white chauvinism, in its underestimation of the militancy and consciousness of the Negro people, who are in no mood to accept small favors, a little gloss of "dignity" while murder walks the streets in a police uniform and children die in disease-ridden slums.

It is obvious now, as we look back over the past four years, that the films produced in 1949 did not lead to serious exploration by Hollywood of material dealing with Negro life, and did not make a dent in the Jim Crow practices of the studios. It is not enough to say that the fight against Jim Crow on the screen and in the studios is four years late. It is fifty years late.

Hollywood Jim Crow is conscious policy, ordered by the owners of the studios, and systematically carried out by everyone in authority from vice-presidents to assistant casting directors. When Negro characters appear on the screen, even in "Negro interest" films, these characters are for the most part Jim Crowed in the scenes in which they appear. Cinematic segregation of Negroes goes with their total exclusion from 99 percent of the pictures produced in the United States. They are not permitted to appear even in street scenes or crowds. Negro actors are employed so rarely and irregularly that it is in most cases impossible for them to earn a living from their profession. Negro musicians are excluded from studio orchestras, and are employed only when a script calls for the appearance of a Negro band.

Negroes are excluded from all other skilled, technical or professional jobs. Out of 33,687 hourly wage earners listed in 1949, there were 175 Negroes: 165 were classified as janitors or maintenance workers; nine were commissary porters or maids, and one was a hair-dresser employed to assist Negro actors only.

The fight for full recognition of the dignity and equality of the Negro people on the screen will never achieve valid results unless it is linked with the fight for full job recognition—on every level, in every area of production, distribution and exhibition, from executives to theatre ushers. The industry is extremely sensitive to attacks on its lily-white employment practices. It cannot afford to have the underlying purpose of these policies exposed. The Negro people and their white allies can force real concessions, if they press their demands with vigor and clarity.

Another important aspect of audience organization relates to the degradation of women on the screen. Women's organizations with the most divergent political views have a common interest in cultivating respect for woman's personality and combatting representation of women as chattels, objects of pornographic slander and instigators of crimes. The millions of women who are actively engaged in social and educational work cannot be indifferent to the influence of films on the conduct and aims of young people, on family life and on attitudes toward money, morals and social responsibility.

An attitude of tolerant amusement toward the film's mockery of women indicates failure to grasp the political significance of the woman question. Hollywood's vulgarities cannot be dismissed as adolescent sexuality, or even senile decay. Films degrade women because their degradation is an economic and political necessity of the drive to fascism and war.

The affronts to woman's dignity and worth in almost every Hollywood film are linked to the pattern of sexuality and violence. Hollywood's false glamor is one of the industry's most precious assets. The glamor is contrived by the methods used in expensive bawdy houses—and a campaign to show that this "cultural" exploitation of women is closely related to their economic exploitation in crime and prostitution would be of incalculable value. It would force Hollywood to take a defensive position, for the glamor

myth is the heart of the "pure entertainment" myth.

Young people have a special interest in film propaganda, because it is directed chiefly to the youth. The motion picture is a major line of communication between the financiers and the generals who are the instigators of war, and the young men and women whose lives would be sacrificed.

It is astonishing that progressive youth organizations have shown so little initiative in dealing with specific issues raised by many recent films—misrepresentation of school and college life, portrayal of young people as morons and potential criminals, contempt for education and science. Analysis of this "cultural" pattern would reveal its real purpose—to develop a generation of robots, devoid of thought or generous feeling, regimented for destruction.

The Jewish masses have not forgotten the lessons of Hitlerism. They are not blind to the fact that the ideology of the war drive bears a sickening resemblance to the ideology that prepared for the destruction of six million Jews in Europe. Reactionary leaders of some Jewish organizations may seek to obscure the connection between anti-Semitic pictures and the smearing of swastikas on synagogues, but the masses of the Jewish people cannot ignore the connection.

Mass activity on the film front is especially important as a contribution to international solidarity. The people of other countries look to us to demonstrate that Hollywood does not speak for the people of the United States, and that we are not a nation of brutes and gangsters. It is particularly important for us to speak out in defense of people whose customs and traditions are insulted by Hollywood.

Viva Zapata! may again serve as an illustration. In August, 1952, news dispatches reported that the picture had been banned in Mexico on the ground that it defamed Zapata and misrepresented Mexican history. We can imagine the urgent messages that passed between Twentieth Century-Fox, the State Department and the United States embassy in Mexico City. Mexico's declaration of cultural sovereignty could not be permitted; in exposing one film, it tended to expose Hollywood's propaganda role. Within a few days, the ban was rescinded, and it was announced from Mexico City that the picture would be shown.

This outrageous interference in another country's internal affairs might have been more difficult if trade unions and people's organization in the United States had previously spoken out against the film. Opposition to *Viva Zapata!* in this country, even if it had not preventing the showing of the film, would have been a gesture of friendship toward our neighbors in Mexico, demonstrating our respect for one of their greatest democratic leaders.

A broad movement to improve the content of commercial motion pictures must include vigorous opposition to the reactionary pressure groups, such as the American Legion and the Legion of Decency, which operate in close cooperation with Hollywood and its Wall Street masters to guarantee the film's propaganda service to the ruling class. These groups, which pretend to speak for "the people" while they represent only vested interests, seek to give the illusion that there is a "popular mandate" for the sort of trash that Hollywood produces. The political function of the Production Code, establishing taboos which interfere with realistic presentation without affecting the prevalent cult of violence and obscenity, must be analyzed and exposed.

Major aspects of a broad program of audience organization may be summarized as follows: (1) honest treatment of working class themes and characters, with full respect for labor's right to organize, and accurate delineation of labor's past and present struggles; (2) portrayal of Negro life and history, not in a few isolated pictures, but in large numbers of films dealing with the manifold aspects of Negro experience and achievement; Negroes must be introduced as participants and equals in films not exclusively devoted to Negro themes, and there must be full equality of employment, on all levels and in all phases of production, distribution and exhibition; (3) an end to stereotypes and racist slanders, directed against the Negro or the Jew, against the Mexican or Italian or the American Indian; honest portrayal of the people of all lands, and an end to the "Anglo-Saxon superiority" viewpoint; (4) respect for woman's personality and an end to degrading generalizations about woman's "inferiority," with consistent development of stories that show the creative role of women in every phase of social activity; (5) interpretation of history that accords with facts and avoids anti-democratic propaganda or insults to popular

traditions, in picturization of the history of the United States, and also in treatment of the history of the Americas and other nations; (6) elimination of material which encourages crime, sadism and perversion, which glorifies gangsters and political informers, and which calls for mob violence; (7) finally, as the meaning and aim of the whole program, recognition that war propaganda is a crime against humanity.

On motion picture screens, the people of the United States see our democratic heritage mocked and rejected. They see and hear the face and voice of fascism. If the face is unmasked and the voice identified, the people will no longer be deceived by the thin illusion that Hollywood is merely trying to "entertain" them.

4. *the responsibility of the artist*

HAVING DISCUSSED some of the tasks that face the people in the battle of ideas, we come to the special, but closely related, problems and responsibilities of cultural workers. Since men and women of the arts and sciences are professionally concerned with ideas, they find themselves in the stormy center of ideological conflict.

The Hollywood witch-hunt has been a particularly gruesome spectacle. It has been a little more widely publicized than similar proceedings in education, science and the arts. But the warning shadow of the man with the gun looms over every college campus and stands in every school room and laboratory, in every theatre and concert hall.

The hundreds of motion picture actors, writers and directors who have been driven from their professions, join a growing distinguished company of artists, scientists and professionals who are officially unemployable because they share Roger Williams' hatred of test oaths, and Thomas Jefferson's "eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."

The present situation in Hollywood exemplifies the deterioration of professional *morale* under the whip of cultural repression. No actor can secure a part in films without undergoing the most painstaking political scrutiny. Any activities or associations which indicate pro-peace, anti-fascist or pro-labor sympathies must be explained and repudiated before employment is granted. An author cannot be assigned to a script without writing a confession of past sins, and even in this unhappy task the writer is not his own master: if his confession is insufficiently abject, the studio prepares a new version, to which he must affix his name or be permanently excluded from employment.

As the lists of "politically unreliable" persons multiply, motion picture workers have no way of knowing whether or not they are included among the suspects. Actors who are not called for jobs, writers who are no longer sought for assignments, can only speculate on the possibility that sometime, somewhere, they have signed a petition or attended a meeting or engaged in an indiscreet conversation. The testimony of informers can rest on gossip, rumor or personal spite. Possession of books or periodicals is likely to have dangerous consequences. (It is probable, for example, that the motion picture employee who reads these words may lose his livelihood if the dereliction is discovered.)

An impressive number of film artists have resisted this heavy pressure, and have shown an integrity and courage which is honored by all who understand the issues. The patriotic service rendered by these men and women will be remembered long after the reputations built by Hollywood's vulgar publicity are forgotten.

One of the aims of the witch-hunt is to establish a complete separation between artists who are still employed and those who have been branded as "witches." It cannot be denied that the witch-hunters have had some success in establishing this separation. In the smog of fear that hangs over Hollywood, studio employees are like people in a plague-ridden city, carefully avoiding contact with anyone who might spread the contagion. The prevalence of fear is the best proof that there is no safety for anyone in this fetid atmosphere.

The artist who remains employed has gained a precarious and temporary margin of security. But the nature of thought control

precludes real security. An actor or writer may see no harm in making an affidavit that he is not and has never been a Communist. If his knowledge of history is limited, he may not know that the test oath is invariably an instrument of tyranny and has no other conceivable purpose. Even in the light of this knowledge, a statement of "loyalty" may seem preferable to the loss of a career.

The trouble with the loyalty oath is not solely that it is morally reprehensible and insults the patriotism of the signer. It has the practical effect (and this is its real purpose) of undermining the signer's security and preparing the way for further indignities. An oath of "loyalty" is not an abstraction; it is a promise of loyalty to the destroyers of democracy, the enemies of the Constitution and its Bill of Rights, the organizers of a suicidal war.

The artist who subscribes to a "simple statement," is signing away a life, the spiritual and intellectual independence that give life meaning. The signer may be called tomorrow to abjure union or guild membership, to denounce friends or associates, to stop reading certain books and periodicals, to engage in pro-fascist or anti-Semitic activity. Above all, the signer is immediately and directly agreeing to act as an informer. These consequences are inherent in the oath, the ugly fruit of the "innocent" pledge.

Since film workers who refuse to sign away their lives are threatened with the loss of their livelihood, it is hardly surprising that many of them submit, while those who have a better understanding of what is at stake tend to submit to the other alternative—that of abandoning the struggle for employment. It is sometimes suggested that artists of integrity should voluntarily leave Hollywood, and all other fields of mass communication. This rationalization is supported by references to the corrupt content of films and other media.

Those who advance this view forget that the struggle for jobs is bound up in the struggle for content, and that the abandonment of one involves the abandonment of the other, leaving the enemies of democracy unopposed. Needless to say, this is exactly what the witch-hunters hope to accomplish.

The right to a job on the basis of ability, without discrimination on account of national origin or race or political belief, or religious faith or lack of faith, is an inalienable right. Theories that it is

unnecessary or impossible to fight for these rights in film or any other cultural field are as untenable as theories that the democratic forces cannot prevent war and fascism.

The control exercised by finance capital over motion pictures is characteristic of the whole cultural superstructure. It is no secret that our colleges and universities are dominated by Big Business. Our secondary schools are managed by Boards of Education which in most cases represent corporate interests and crime-ridden local politics. It would be rash to conclude that all honest teachers should voluntarily abandon teaching and that the fight for decent educational standards is hopeless.

We can sympathize with the dilemma of the artist without falling into the error of supposing that it is altogether different from the hard choices that face other citizens. In every walk of life, men and women are being told to conform to the McCarthy brand of "patriotism" or suffer the consequences of nonconformity. The individual who stands alone is comparatively helpless. Hope lies in collective action.

The artist alone is no stronger than the steelworker alone or the housewife alone. One can give no optimistic counsel to the writer or actor, director or technician, who seeks a personal answer to the dilemma of the time. The moral imperatives of responsible citizenship are the same for the film worker as for every other citizen. There are certain acts which are outside the pale of decency. The Biblical injunction, "Thou shalt not bear false witness," applies to every political informer, who is always a false witness because only lies can prove a "conspiracy" which is patently non-existent.

There are minimal requirements in regard to professional assignments. No honorable actor or writer would want to be associated with films which applaud the Nazis, insult the Negro people, support anti-Semitism, libel Communists, propagandize for war, or attack fundamental democratic rights. Participation in films like *The Desert Fox* or *I Was a Communist for the FBI* is no more excusable than the collaboration of writers and actors with the Nazi movement in Germany.

Yet it must be noted that actors and writers who consider themselves decent citizens have taken part in pictures of this type.

It is not altogether fair to say that in all cases these artists have abandoned honor in order to gain employment. There have been cowardice and venality. But there is also lack of understanding of the artist's social role and responsibility.

The great need of film artists and all other cultural workers is collective action, especially through professional organizations, trade unions and guilds, to protect their professional and personal rights—including the right to organize and bargain collectively, which is gravely threatened by the Congressional subversion of the First Amendment. Despite the courage of numerous individuals, there has been tragic lack of effective organization or leadership among people employed in the motion picture industry.

This was not the case in 1947: when the Un-American Committee held its first public hearings in Washington, leading actors, writers and directors were quick to see that the Committee's "investigation" was a deadly danger to all cultural workers. Film artists formed the Committee for the First Amendment, and chartered a plane to attend the hearings and express their disapproval of the proceedings.

There is a note of prophecy in some of the statements made by Hollywood personalities six years ago. Judy Garland said: "Before every free conscience in America is subpoenaed, please speak up." Gregory Peck said: "There is more than one way to lose your liberty. It can be torn from your hands by a tyrant—but it can also slip away, day by day, while you're too busy to notice, or too confused or too scared." Frank Sinatra asked: "Are they going to scare us into silence? I wonder."*

These six years seem to have given an affirmative answer to Sinatra's question. But we can hope that it is not a final answer. To anyone familiar with Hollywood today, the statements made by film stars in 1947 seem unreal, wistful echoes of voices that are now silent. Yet reality—the truth of life and history—is repre-

sented by the 1947 statements. One can hardly suppose that most of these artists have abandoned the serious patriotic opinions which they no longer dare to express.

Unfortunately, the enormous political and economic pressure brought to bear on film workers, to insure their regimentation, has not been met by an effective opposition on the part of the more important guilds and unions in the industry. The labor leadership in Hollywood has tended to follow the example of those national trade union officials who are more interested in anti-Communism than in the defense of labor's rights. A number of film and television performers who invoked their Constitutional rights before the Un-American Committee have been threatened with expulsion from their unions.* The Screen Writers Guild has moved to place similar restrictions on writers, permitting the motion picture companies to refuse screen credits to writers who oppose the witch hunt.

The failure of most of Hollywood's guilds and unions to defend the elementary rights of their members, with the virulent red-baiting by many of their leaders, is in part responsible for the atmosphere of terror which pervades the industry. It is obvious, of course, that the guilds and unions are gravely weakened, and their future existence jeopardized, by the repression which their leaders have encouraged.

However, the silence that pervades Hollywood does not extend to other areas of culture. The first six months of 1953 have seen growing opposition to McCarthyism. Powerful organizations, especially in the field of education and religion, have spoken out against the inquisitorial methods of Congressional "investigations" of thought and speech. Important sections of the labor movement have also begun to see that the attack on freedom of speech and association threatens the existence of trade unions. The C.I.O. warned of the danger at its 1952 convention, and more recently, the C.I.O. *News* denounced McCarthy's attack on the press, saying that it "smells strongly of intimidation." An editorial in the March

* Among other film personalities who made vigorous statements attacking the Un-American Committee's 1947 hearings were William Wyler, Lucille Ball, Margaret Sullivan, Myrna Loy, Melvyn Douglas, Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Burt Lancaster, Robert Young, Gene Kelly, Van Heflin, Evelyn Keyes. (Gordon Kahn, *Hollywood on Trial*, New York, 1948, pp. 215-226.)

* The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists was the first actors' organization to penalize its members for invoking their Constitutional rights before investigating Committees. The Screen Actors Guild has proposed a similar ruling.

15 issue of *The Black Worker*, organ of the A. F. of L. Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, points out that McCarthyism is "a symptom of fascism."

McCarthy has been particularly arrogant and brutal in his treatment of authors, many of whom have been called to Washington to be questioned by the would-be *Fuehrer* from Wisconsin concerning books they have written. It is clear that McCarthy intends to censor—and no doubt burn—books of which he disapproves.

The position of the Authors' League of America is of critical importance in the defense of the rights of authors. We have noted that the League issued a strong protest when the Un-Americans held their first Hollywood hearings in 1947. The Council of the League reiterated its warning in 1952, in a resolution which calls "political screening" of writers "a basic threat to the entire body of free American writing:"

"From the earliest days of this nation's life, our tradition has been that writers and writing should be free from political control. Today this tradition is being eroded by fear. Today any American writer may be subjected to dismissal, disgrace and disaster through the organized activities of self-appointed monitors eager to defend the nation on their own terms."*

The statement is a useful contribution to the fight against cultural repression in the United States. In view of its importance, the wording of the document deserves thoughtful scrutiny. The reference to "the organized activities of self-appointed monitors" is an accurate description of the racket conducted by the publishers of *Red Channels* in listing names of artists who are suspected of "heresy." There are a number of fascist and semi-fascist groups conducting similar irresponsible activities in and around Hollywood.

However, the emphasis on these private groups tends to divert attention from the main danger—the use of governmental power to subvert the Constitution and destroy all freedom of speech, press, assembly and religion. The shabby racketeers of *Red Channels* are the by-products of the official suppression of ideas and people's organizations by the government itself. The Hollywood Ten were not imprisoned by "self-appointed monitors," but by the Truman

administration. It is the Attorney General of the United States, operating under direct control of the executive branch, who offends order and decency by compiling endless lists of *verboden* organizations. Congressmen sit in judgment on books and probe "dangerous thoughts." McCarthy could not maintain his present power without the support and approval of President Eisenhower.

In spite of a generally commendable position against censorship, the Authors' League has not taken any serious steps to meet this formidable attack on the rights of its members. It has not identified the nature and source of the fascist threat. The League and its guilds have not rallied their membership or mobilized their full influence and resources to meet the "basic threat to the entire body of free American writing."

If the eight thousand writers composing the League had united to defend the authors attacked in 1947, and if Hollywood guilds and unions had joined the fight, along with cultural organizations in other fields, the history of these years might have been somewhat different.

There are three or four million cultural workers in the United States. If a substantial number of them moved with a measure of unity and strength, their demands could not be ignored.

Most of the men and women of the arts, sciences and professions respect themselves and their work; they know, from daily experience, that thought control jeopardizes their professional lives. Yet they find it almost impossible, as individuals, to fight thought control. Many of them prefer to take refuge in what Milton called "a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised, unbreathed." The negative virtue has its penalties. War cannot be averted, and fascism cannot be appeased, by silence.

The failure of many intellectuals in the United States to speak out against the anger of war and fascism, cannot be attributed solely to caution. People are not always cautious when their basic rights are threatened. People are afraid when they see no hope of successful struggle, when they feel alone, confused by the issues and the magnitude of their difficulties, unprepared to fight for a visible and possible goal.

This feeling of *aloneness* and frustration is in part due to the way in which intellectuals live and work in our society: their con-

tacts with people outside their immediate professional circle are traditionally restricted. As a result they are likely to have no deep confidence, born of experience and participation, in the organized strength of the people. The pattern of isolation was broken to some extent during the Roosevelt period; artists, writers and scientists began to function as citizens. But their activity was chiefly in their own fields of professional interest. The violent attack on their right of speech and association has been directed, in the main, against the movements in which they participated in the Roosevelt period, and has been calculated to drive them back into isolation and to prevent any organized defense.

While many intellectuals are weak or silent, only a few have shown any tendency to adopt the fascist program. There is confusion and cynicism. These defeatist moods are useful to Wall Street and are cultivated by reaction. But they are *negative* aspects of the fascist drive, indicating that there is as yet no substantial body of public opinion which accepts the positive program of regimentation and control by an elite class.

Almost every issue of the *Saturday Review* laments the lack of hope or direction in contemporary thought. An editorial proclaims that "We need to see ourselves reflected, not as objects of pity and even contempt, but as larger than we are."^{*}

An article by Claude M. Fuess is entitled, "Can Writers be Too Objective?" Fuess finds that they are much too objective. They insist on telling the world, "including Soviet Russia, that we are degenerate, uncivilized and brutal." As a result, "Some observers think we are confused, and we unquestionably give that impression to visitors. But are we confused because we are without a Voice, or without a Voice because we are confused?"^{**} Like so much that is written by the cultural experts looking for a viable defense of imperialism, Fuess' words sound like a cruel parody. The fact that he is not joking is a measure of the breakdown of cultural values.

The high-priced voices crying out for a Voice cannot find any honorable argument for war and fascism. All the honorable arguments are on the side of peace and democracy. Practitioners of

the arts and sciences are the guardians of culture. Unfortunately many of them have only slight knowledge of the culture they are supposed to be guarding. Their contact with the nation's past, like their contact with contemporary events, is shaped by the propaganda of imperialism.

The United States was born in a great liberating revolution which shook the thrones of Europe and inspired popular revolts throughout the Western Hemisphere. In his *Letter to American Workers*, Lenin wrote that "It was a war of the American people against English robbers who subjected America and held it in colonial slavery as these 'civilized' bloodsuckers are even now subjecting and holding in colonial slavery hundreds of millions of people in India, Egypt and in all corners of the world."

Lenin, writing in 1918, noted that the First World War gave global power to the billionaires of the United States: "They have profited most of all. They have made all, even the richest countries their vassals. They have plundered hundreds of billions of dollars. . . . And every dollar is stained with blood."^{**}

In order to conceal the reality of this historical process, Wall Street decrees the revision of history to fit the present pattern of exploitation and military conquest. Georgi Dimitroff wrote in 1935 that "the fascists are rummaging through the entire *history* of every nation . . . hundreds of books are being published in Germany which pursue one aim—to falsify the history of the German people and give it a fascist complexion."^{*} The same thing is being done in the United States today. The savants who follow the dictates of Wall Street are rummaging through our history with indecent haste to falsify the revolutionary and progressive aspects of the struggle for independence, and to conceal the role that popular movements and forces have played in the whole course of American development, and substitute a fascist interpretation of the past.

In a recent work, *The Irony of American History*, Reinhold Niebuhr goes as far as Whittaker Chambers in attacking the whole concept of progress and growth. The irony of our history,

^{*} *A Letter to American Workers*, New York (1934), pp. 9-11.

^{**} *Working Class Unity—Bulwark Against Fascism*, New York, 1935, p. 78.

^{*} Feb. 23, 1952.

^{**} March 22, 1952.

according to Niebuhr, lies in our mistaken reliance on the Jeffersonian idea of man's perfectibility and the power of reason: "The course of American history," he writes, "is a neat and ironic parable for the whole meaning of the liberal dream. . . . The democratic dreamers were almost as wrong as the communist planners." Niebuhr feeds the imperialist position that the present world mission of the United States demands quick abandonment of democratic dreaming, so that we can proceed with the bloody business which is our historical destiny.*

Niebuhr believes that man has no control of history, cannot pretend to understand it: "The realm of mystery and meaning which encloses and finally makes sense out of the baffling configurations of history is not identical with any scheme of rational intelligibility."** In view of this, we can hardly expect Niebuhr's discussion of imperialism to make sense. Yet his obscurantism is not quite as baffling as it may at first appear. He writes:

"Perhaps the most deleterious consequences of imperialism are in the spiritual rather than in the economic realm. . . . One of the real spiritual evils of imperialism is that it obsesses a nation held in tutelage with the idea that all of its ills flow from the imperial occupation."

Niebuhr finds that there is "no spiritual basis in the Orient for what we know as the 'dignity of the individual'"—which explains the present situation in China. But Niebuhr finds a different "spiritual" climate in territories still controlled by the United States: "There are genuine spiritual and moral affinities between ourselves and Japan and the Philippines, which will make it possible to hold the 'island littoral' in the Pacific."***

Thus the scholar betrays his calling, prostituting the muse of history to Wall Street's profit-lust. The word *spiritual*—a word that expresses high human aspirations—is used as a simpering mask to hide the face of dollar diplomacy. Niebuhr asks us to forget

* *ibid.*, pp. 112, 115, 125, 127.

** New York, 1952, pp. 77-78.

*** *ibid.*, p. 150.

that imperialism is economic exploitation. He asks us to see only the simpering mask: then a people in chains will not make the mistake of thinking they would be better off if they break their chains. The Orient, he tells us, has fallen into "spiritual evils" because the people are in revolt. But we still have "spiritual affinities"—the simpering mask has not yet fallen—in Japan and the Philippines.

Niebuhr is right in arguing that the imperialist policies to which the government of our country is at present committed demand total revision of our history. Since it cannot be denied that our national culture is built to a large extent on the principles proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, Niebuhr asks us to regard the Declaration and all the struggles flowing from it as an "ironic" error. Niebuhr holds that life is essentially sinful, and the greatest sin of all is pride, exhibited in resistance to exploitation and faith in man's ability to achieve progress. There is a remarkable passage about the poor:

"To assign a Messianic function in history to the poor not only seems to transmute their resentments into vehicles of the ultimate good; but it also eases the conscience of those who are affronted by social injustice. As a religion, this faith generates what in Christian terms is regarded as the very essence of sin."*

This is the definition of sin we have already encountered in the stoolpigeon autobiography, *Witness*. Like Chambers' book and all other apologies for fascism, Niebuhr's essay on the irony of our history is such a shoddy performance that at times it seems to verge on burlesque. Yet the shallowness of the argument and the confusion of the author's style are in themselves a warning to intellectuals. The reader who travels through this blighted landscape sees what our culture will be like if Wall Street's cultural hegemony is not challenged. For the writer or scholar, it is a deadly prospect—the abandonment of all the values to which literature and thought and science have been dedicated.

* *ibid.*, p. 122.

We cannot protect the progressive and rational values inherited from the past struggles of the people, unless we recognize both the achievements and the limitations of democracy, as it has evolved in our country. The democratic beliefs which played a vital part in our early history were shaped by great movements of the people—the agrarian revolts of the Colonial period, the Revolution against British domination, the rising power of labor in the Jacksonian period, the fight led by labor for free schools, the extension of the suffrage, the Negro liberation struggle, the westward movement across plains and mountains, the war to destroy slavery, the great industrial struggles of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the increasingly important role of the Communist Party as the conscience and voice of the vanguard of the working class. In this historical development, the degree to which rights were won by sections of the population depended on the relationship of class forces. The oppressed classes helped to create and expand a democratic and progressive culture as a weapon in their struggle. The bourgeoisie was forced to make concessions, which were also motivated by the necessity of developing the nation's natural and human resources. The potentialities of the continent's wealth could not be tapped unless people were mobilized. The West could not be opened without bold pioneers. Workers had to be brought from Europe to build railroads and industries. Chattel slavery had to be destroyed in order to permit further growth of industrial capitalism.

The representatives of landed property and commerce who wrote the Constitution did not want a Bill of Rights, and excluded it from the document submitted to the states. A Bill of Rights had to be adopted, because the majority of the people knew that the young nation could not exist and grow without it. Walt Whitman's songs of free man's infinite capacities were not pleasing to the bourgeoisie of the middle nineteenth century. But the struggle against slavery was an historical necessity—and Whitman's voice was the voice of the people who would give their lives to destroy slavery.

Whitman's voice is still heard today. The people for whom he spoke have not forgotten their history. The people are betrayed by a ruling class which can no longer maintain its failing power

without attacking all the rights won by the people in the great struggles of the past.

Theodore Dreiser wrote in 1932:

"Americans! Men and women! The forces of change are deep-seated and subtle, yet sure and swift in their approach and final determination. And the situation in America, like the constantly moving and shattering and rejoining energy of the universe, is being changed and will continue to change. It is life. And as life there need be no fear of it."^o

The artist who fears life is lost.

5. independent production

WHEN WE SPEAK of independent production, we are not referring to the independence of film producers who are somewhat grudgingly allowed to exist on the fringes of the Hollywood industry, using money borrowed from the big banks and dependent on the system of distribution and exhibition controlled by the Big Money. Production which is independent in a creative sense must be free from monopoly control, free from the class domination of the bourgeoisie, and—this is a condition which is in some respects most difficult to guarantee—free from the ideology of the dominant class.

We are not using the word *independent* in the sense in which it is sometimes used by artists and writers—to suggest personal "independence" from social responsibility, "freedom" to express subjective moods without respect for objective reality. This egotistical illusion is one of the main means by which the artist is kept chained to the ideology of capitalism; as long as the artist adheres to the ruling class view that creative activity is metaphysical, subjective and unrelated to class interests, he is permitted to cherish the pretense of "freedom" to compensate for his impotence.

^o *Tragic America*, London (1932), p. 400.

The socially responsible artist cannot be "independent" of the demands of the artistic conscience. On the contrary, recognition of the social function of art includes the obligation to maintain the most rigorous standards of technique and craftsmanship. If the artist loves and respects the people, to whom his work is addressed, he will wish to bring every resource of sensitivity and imagination and disciplined skill, to make the work worthy of the audience. Hollywood has trained many facile craftsmen, whose accomplishments deserve study and respect. But studio methods tend to deaden creative initiative, and to set narrow limits on the development of talent. Contempt for people, and therefore for art, is inherent in Hollywood's attitude toward its own workers, toward the product which they make, and toward the audience.

In film, as in other forms of expression, the creative opportunities which every serious artist seeks are stifled, not only by Hollywood's belt-line system of production and by the recent increase in political censorship, but by capitalism's basic hatred and fear of free expression. Being hostile to art, capitalism demands servility and renunciation of the right to observe and create freely, as the first condition of cultural "respectability" and employment. The creator who can throw off the shackles of bourgeois ideology emerges into the sunlight of reality with the whole world to explore and interpret.

There are some supposedly "progressive" cultural workers who have little feeling for these potentialities. While they recognize the dangers of fascism, they feel that their "artistic integrity" is best defended by staying aloof from social issues and devoting themselves to aesthetic values—thus accepting the deadening limitation which capitalism imposes on them.

These artists assert that it is "sectarian," and a little indecent, to talk about a class approach to art. They may be willing, and even eager in certain cases, to "bring their art to the working class," provided the working class will accept it on *their* terms. They cannot admit that their vision must be transformed and made new if it is to serve a new purpose. Being blinded by bourgeois values, they cannot see that these values are inimical to the creative process, in the significant sense of the word. They cannot see that

they must free themselves from the prison of bourgeois ideology, in order to discover fields of art as broad as the horizons of man's knowledge.

There are formidable obstacles in the way of independent cultural production. The subjective difficulties of the artist in discarding the old baggage of bourgeois "art" are, to a considerable extent, the reflection in the mind of the artist of the real objective impediments.

The obstructions in the way of independent motion picture production are no less, and in some respects greater, than those in other fields. Films are expensive to produce. The political attention focused on Hollywood shows that the rulers of the United States take the film very seriously as an instrument of propaganda, and will do their utmost to prevent its use for any democratic purpose. They have the advantage of a tightly controlled monopoly, which operates the major theatre chains and can exert a great deal of economic pressure on the small and theoretically "independent" exhibitors.

The difficulties in the way of independent production, and its potential significance, are dramatically suggested in the case of the film, *Salt of the Earth*, which will be completed late in 1953. The fascist forces were aroused to fury by the news that the film was in production in New Mexico, sponsored by the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, and made by artists who had been supposedly "silenced forever" by the Un-American Committee. The fury with which the project was attacked proves the fear which it evoked among the enemies of culture. Their alleged devotion to "free enterprise" is quickly forgotten when the enterprise involves the honest portrayal of working class life.

Congressman Jackson thundered against *Salt of the Earth* in the halls of Congress, calling, in effect, for vigilante terrorism to stop the making of the film. In response to Jackson's call, organized groups of hoodlums interfered with the people at work on the picture. Jackson's speech was repeated almost hourly over the radio in Silver City, where the production was being made. The union issued a statement holding Jackson directly responsible for the lawless acts committed in Silver City and Bayard: "Every effort to

whip up the vigilante spirit that resulted in violence was based on quotations from Representative Jackson's speech."

The U. S. immigration authorities arrested the well known Mexican actress, Rosaura Revueltas, who played the leading role in *Salt of the Earth*, on the totally false charge that she was in the United States illegally. Despite the fact that she had a passport, visa and a work permit in perfect order, she was carried to El Paso, where she was held under arrest, denied the right of bail, which is a routine matter in similar cases, and finally forced to return to Mexico without completing the final scenes in which she was to appear.

It must be regretfully noted that certain reactionary trade union leaders played a part in these patently illegal attempts to interfere with freedom of expression. Roy E. Brewer of the IATSE joined with Representative Jackson in irresponsible denunciation of the picture. The Screen Actors Guild refused to take any action to protest against the arrest of Miss Revueltas. When the National Association of Actors of Mexico City, incensed at the treatment of one of its most distinguished members, called on the Hollywood actors' organization to participate in efforts to obtain her release, the request was denied.

In spite of the difficulties, work on *Salt of the Earth* went on. After the film company left the area, there were further outbreaks of violence, in which two union halls were burned, and the home of a miner who took part in the picture was destroyed by an incendiary fire.

It is not as yet possible to form any judgment on the artistic merits of *Salt of the Earth*, as the film is being edited, and only the script is at present available for consideration. The author, Michael Wilson, has written a strong, tender, and moving story of a miner's family, told against the background of a strike in which the wives of the miners took over the picket-line when an injunction prevented the men from holding the line. The basic theme is the emergence of a woman's personality as she breaks the shackles of prejudice and achieves full partnership and equality with her husband in the course of the struggle.

If the possibilities of the story are realized on the screen, *Salt*

of the Earth will be a vital contribution to the development of a people's and working class film art in the United States. It will stimulate new efforts along similar lines. The growing movement for peace and democracy makes it imperative that conscientious film artists devote their experience and talent to the difficult, and richly rewarding, tasks of independent production.

The need for a people's film art is world-wide, and there is a social and artistic relationship between the efforts of film-makers in widely separated areas. The struggle around *Salt of the Earth* is somewhat similar to the struggle conducted by film workers and working class organizations in Japan, where the attempt to regiment commercial production by repression and political censorship has paralleled the fascist drive in the United States. In the spring of 1948, 30 directors, actors and technicians were dismissed by Toho, the major Japanese film company. A strike organized by the Motion Picture Workers' Union was broken by 1,000 Japanese police, backed by United States troops and tanks.

Since there is a strong movement in Japan for defense of the nation's safety and interests against United States imperialism, the attempt to force film artists to make pro-fascist and pro-war films was met with vigorous and widely supported resistance. Progressives, driven from the commercial studios, formed such organizations as the Modern Actors Association and the Toho Actors League, entering into an alliance with trade unions to produce honest, realistic films.

In the Hokkaido District of Japan, the Coal Miners Union of the district worked with professional writers, directors, actors and technicians to make a picture dealing with the lives of the miners. The Japanese government and the mine-owners, operating, of course, in conjunction with Wall Street and Washington and using the same methods, resorted to open violence and terrorism, in attempting to prevent completion of the Hokkaido film.

Nevertheless, the alliance between film artists and the labor movement has shown impressive results in Japan. A number of pictures have received critical acclaim, and are reaching increasingly large audiences.

The audience for such films in the United States is potentially

vast. But it is not easy to reach these potential spectators. They are at present culturally unorganized, confused and misled by the barrage of propaganda to which they are subjected. Wall Street has erected an iron curtain to separate the independent creator from the working class, from the fifteen million Negro people of the United States, and from the masses who are their prospective allies.

The organized action of trade unions and people's organizations, on an ever wider scale, is the only means of breaking down the barrier. The pace of independent production will depend on the organized activity developed around it.

Of special importance, in film as in all other forms of communication, is the development of the cultural resources of the Negro people. It goes without saying that any project dedicated to a people's culture must involve participation and leadership of Negro artists, the employment of Negro men and women on all levels and in all phases of production. But beyond this, the national liberation movement of the Negro people demands its own organs of expression.

The demand is already being met by such pictures as the brilliant documentary dealing with the life of Frederick Douglass, made by Carleton Moss with the cooperation of the Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association and the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. The film utilizes the Douglass home in Washington, now preserved as a memorial to the great Negro leader, and evokes from the books, pictures and physical objects in the home a profound and truthful portrayal of Douglass' career and the whole sweep of historic events in which he participated.

A film of a very different sort, but equally significant as an expression of the culture of the Negro people, is *A Letter to a Georgia Mother*, made by the Agricultural Workers Union, dealing with the experience of Negro migratory workers in their seasonal travels along the Atlantic seaboard from Georgia to New Jersey. The picture, made at slight expense, with little professional assistance, achieves a feeling for people and a sense of human experience which is rarely found in more ambitious works.

There is an immediate need for the establishment of film pro-

ducing companies under the control of Negro artists, tapping the reservoir of talent available in the interrelated fields of theatre, music, and the dance, to utilize these immeasurably rich resources of skill and experience, in films depicting the national culture of the Negro people, their glorious history, their present efforts to achieve full freedom. The great liberation struggle that is now developing in Africa—scandalously libeled in dozens of commercial films circulating chauvinistic caricatures and "white supremacy" myths about Africa—offers epic possibilities to Negro artists.

Participation of white artists and technicians in such productions is obviously desirable. But the control of the undertaking must be determined by its character, as an expression of the national aspirations and unique culture of the Negro people.

Emphasis on independent film activity does not involve underestimation of the struggle to influence the Hollywood product, nor is it based on disregard of the creative and technical achievements of the commercial film, in the United States and in other countries. The motion picture art of the Soviet Union has exerted a wide influence everywhere, including Hollywood. Indeed the history of the Hollywood film includes periods when the example of certain Soviet pictures brought major changes in directorial and photographic techniques. In the middle twenties, *Potemkin* was intensively studied and imitated. In the nineteen-thirties, Hollywood's approach to cinematic art was revitalized by such pictures as *The Road to Life*, *Chapayev*, *The Youth of Maxim*, and the films dealing with Lenin's life.

England, France, Germany, Italy and the Scandinavian countries have made historic contributions to the development of the motion picture. There has been a lively interchange of talent and ideas between European producers and the picture industry of the United States.* Particularly important in their influence on Hollywood concepts were the remarkable German films dealing realistically with working class life, made immediately before the rise of Hitler, notably *Kameradschaft* and *Kuhle Wampe*.

The documentary film has enjoyed a measure of independence—although seldom free from business and governmental pressures—which has enabled the ablest documentary directors to explore

certain facets of life and productive labor with less stringent limitations than those imposed on regular film production. The work of Joris Ivens provides a valuable history of the struggle for realism in the documentary field, which has also been advanced by Paul Strand's *The Wave*, Pare Lorentz' *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, Leo Hurwitz' *Native Land*—to mention only a few among the innumerable creative achievements in documentary films.

Among Hollywood films which contain elements of realism, and notable lessons in craftsmanship, mention may be made of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Informer*, *Grapes of Wrath*, *The Life of Emile Zola*.

The world's greatest motion picture artist has lived and worked in Hollywood, during the whole of his distinguished career. While Chaplin's world reputation, and management of his own company, have given him a good deal of creative latitude, he has functioned under the general conditions of Hollywood production, both in the operation of his studio and the Big Business control of the exhibition of his pictures. Today, in a Hollywood paralyzed by fear, Chaplin no longer has a place. There can be no better proof of capitalism's hatred of art than the exclusion from the United States of an artist loved and respected by millions throughout the world.

In all of Chaplin's films, from his earliest work to the moving affirmation of the beauty and goodness of life in *Limelight*, there is an imaginative depth, combined with realistic understanding of social forces and class relationships, which must be studied and re-studied by every artist seriously concerned with the problems of the film.

In order to advance the art of the motion picture, it is essential to utilize all that the film has accomplished in the half century of its history, in capitalist countries as well as in the Soviet Union, and more recently in China and the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe. To understand and extend these achievements, we must recognize the main features of the present stage of mo-

* Since we are dealing here solely with past influences on the development of the commercial film in the United States, no mention is made of the very impressive recent development of film production in India and in many other lands.

tion picture development: on the one hand, paralysis and decadence in Hollywood and wherever the Hollywood influence is paramount; on the other hand, the flowering of the art in the lands of socialism, and the search for new forms and content wherever the people are struggling to achieve democracy and a democratic culture.

The repressive power of Wall Street places difficulties in the way of an independent film art in the United States. But the artist who faces the difficulties looks to great rewards in the gratitude of the people, in patriotic accomplishment, in the magnitude and beauty of the stories that wait to be told—the riches of legend and history, these struggles of labor and the Negro people, the heroism of daily existence. There is tenderness, emotional depth and moral power in the common life of the classes that have not lost confidence in themselves, in their country, in the future.

In *Mother*, Gorky portrays the awakening consciousness of a working class woman. As the mother comes to understand the struggles in which her son is engaged, she realizes that he is fighting for everything that is good and true, for humanity's future. It is this relationship between a consistent *class viewpoint* and a deep consciousness of human and ethical values—not seen abstractly but as the values for which the working class is fighting—that gives *Mother* its profound and lasting meaning. When her son is arrested in the May Day demonstration, the mother picks up the torn flag he had been carrying and cries out to the people in the crowd around her:

... "You are all dear people, you are all good people. Open up your hearts. Look around without fear, without terror. Our children are going into the world, our children are going, our blood is going for the truth; with honesty in their hearts they open the gates of the new road—a straight, wide road for all. . . ."

And again, late in the story, she cries out, "We will cleanse the whole of life."**

* Maxim Gorky, *Mother*, New York (1947), p. 188.

** *Ibid*, p. 391.

Independent film production in the United States requires artists who possess this consciousness of reality, who are able to open their hearts, to "look around without fear, without terror," using their art in love and reverence for humanity, to "cleanse the whole of life."